

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1970</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 4	"Age Old Question"	Job 28: 12-14
January 18	Communion Mediation	
February 1	"Reflections On A Text"	II Corinth. 12: 8-9
February 8	"- - And - -Love"	I Corinthians 13: 13
February 11	"Make Time - Take Time "	
February 15	"In The Confused Tumult of Life: What Does It Means?"	Luke 18:36
February 22	"In The Confused Tumult of Life: What Do You Want?"	Luke 18:41
March 1	"In The Confused Tumult of Life: From Me?"	Luke 18:41
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March 15	"In The Confused Tumult of Life: What Was Made Of It? or So What?"	Luke 18:43
March 22	Palm Sunday	
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April 5	"That Man Thomas"	
April 19	"Wilderness Way"	Exodus 13:17-18
April 26	"That My Soul Might See"	Isaiah 45:3
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<u>1970- continued</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
May 31	"On Not Living In Vain"	
June 7	"Against The Savage Ills Of Living"	John 16:2
June 14	"And I Have Seen A Vision"	James 1:22
June 21	"Keep Cool And Pray"	I Peters 4:7
July 5	"God's Favorites"	Deuteronomy 8
July 12	"On Meeting Problems"	Mark 8:1-9
August 2	"Whatever You Shall Ask -"	John 16:23-24
August 9	"Today - Where Are You"	Luke 4: 16-21
August 23	"What The Sermon's All About"	I Corinthians 15:1
August 30	"The Gospel Of Optimism"	Romans 8:24
September 6	"God's Cure For Worry"	Matthew 6:23-34
September 13	"Man's Greatest Problem"	Matthew 15:27
September 20	"Heart Sense"	Ephesians 4:2
September 27	"As I Seem To Me"	Nehemiah 6:11
October 11	"God In The Present Tense"	Exodus 3:5
October 18	"A Man Named Luke"	
November 1	"Nearer To The Heart's Desire"	Deuteronomy 34:4
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December 6	"He Comes: Reject Him"	
December 13	"He Comes: Ignore Him"	
December 20	"He Comes: Recognize Him"	

December 24

Christmas Eve

Luke 2:16

December 27

"A Different Way"

Matthew 2:12

January 4, 1970

"AGE OLD QUESTION"
(Job 28:12-14)

We have so little time, O God, the pressure of life is that great that even with some effort we've taken just a corner out of a week to be in this place. Let it be for Your honor and glory, that it might be for our good. Amen.

Whatever else I may appear to you to be, in relating the incident that I'm about to tell you, please don't look upon me as being cynical, but rather as I tell you the incident, consider it simply as an objective statement of fact.

Several weeks ago we had our annual Christmas dinner party for the staff. All of us were there, full-time, part-time, together with their mates. Needless to say, as you might suspect, it proved to be a very delightful occasion. The climax came when we had finished everything that we'd set out to do in Bieber Hall, the supper and the program -- we came here to the Nave and had a family-style Communion service. For no matter how frivolous we may have been momentarily down-stairs, we were in duty bound to remind ourselves that those of us who are privileged to serve on the staff want to set before you ourselves as channels of God-come-to-us-in-Jesus Christ.

But what I really want to relate to you is the program in Bieber Hall. The Master of Ceremonies, once we had eaten, directed us to the Christmas tree, and underneath the Christmas tree a series of gaily-wrapped packages..

...now before we came, each one was told that we would not have the

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customary exchange of dollar gifts. This year there was to be no expending of money whatsoever, but rather each person coming to the party would look around and lay his hand upon something that he got last year, and he just didn't know what to do with in the course of the past year....a golden chance, you see, that he might get rid of it now.....

The Master of Ceremonies said to the first man up -- surely you're familiar with the procedure, you go and you take a package, unlabeled, of course... then the second man had the privilege of taking what the first man had already chosen, or he could go under the tree and take something else. So the cycle continued, would you believe me, for well over an hour, as the almost thirty people went back and forth to this person or to the tree.

I'm not so sure that there were many who observed this, and if they did observe it, they thought it to themselves, not really as bold as I'm being right now - - - but when the evening was over, I dare say practically every person went home little better off by taking with him as over against what he himself had brought to the occasion. And if the feature were to be repeated next year, chances are the contents of the packages might be pretty well the same, only the wrappings would be changed. And this is a parable of life.

For life is a gathering of people, and no matter how prolonged the interchange or the interplay, it could be that eventually every man ends up with something on his hands that he'd still like to be rid of. This is a parable of life. If you and I could be very honest with ourselves, right now, if one were inclined to turn this into a testimonial meeting, there might not be too much hesitation on the part of a good many of us to tell about the things

that, right now, would to God we could be completely rid of.

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I'm perfectly aware of the fact that this is the first Sunday of the new year, and as I stand at this sacred desk I know that some of us have come into the new decade as well as to a new year allowing ourselves momentarily to think that this year is going to be better. God have mercy upon any man who doesn't hope for anything better. But quite realistically, each of us will go on dragging into the new year any number of problems that have beset us in the past year. Simply tearing off the page on a calendar or replacing an old calendar with a new one, or going from one decade to another, gives no assurance whatsoever that the situation in the new period is going to be much different than the situation in the past. I've lived too long to believe it to be otherwise.

The story of everyman is a man who is burdened, easily beset, carrying along either within him or behind him something that, if he had his choice, he'd like to be rid of. In my daily Bible readings these days I've recently covered the entire Book of Job. And as I muse upon that character, I'm inclined to think for the moment that he could have been the exception to everything that's been said so far in this sermon. For a while, you see, Job appears to be the man who had everything. He had no complaints, he was getting along very nicely. That's why Job looms on the horizon of our thought right now, because there were certain people who maintained that such a thing just couldn't be, and they wanted to prove their case, that there just couldn't be a contented man, a man completely free of burdens.

Job had some friends, who came to Job when Job discovered that he had a problem. The picture changed, changed greatly. For 15 chapters his friends try to establish the case that Job has the burden, the problem that he has,

the thing that he wants to get rid of, because he's done something wrong, he's committed a terrible sin....

...quite indidentally, Job happened to be a very honest man, so honest that for 20 chapters, with almost a degree of irreverence, he maintains that he wasn't to blame....

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But the fact is this -- no matter how much talking went on, either by the advance of an argument or by a rebuttal, the fact remains that Job still has his problem. So recognizing that he is a man with a problem, he cries out for some measure of understanding. You'll find the text for this meditation in the 28th chapter of the Book of Job, 12 - 14 verses:

"But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? . . .

The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me."

Job's hang-up came when he tried to figure out the moral implications of his problem -- why did it have to happen to me? Why do I have to carry it? Why can't I get rid of it?

The ray of light came to Job when he discovered that his real sickness was not the sickness of the body, but the sickness of the soul. And the great thrust in the Book of Job comes when you read these words:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

So Job introduces God upon the horizon of his thought, God figures very largely. Physically distressed, his greater illness was of the soul.

Soul-sickness, that is, that's the problem we're never quite free of. It has a variety of shapes and moods, but it's basically the same for all of us. The soul-sickness that many of us experience is due to the fact that the problems that we have are problems that we've brought upon ourselves. Job wasn't willing

to settle on that score, but you and I can readily recognize that, can't we? We look back over the years and we see that were to blame - -

...thoughts that we should never have had about people...

...things that we should never have said....

...deeds that we should have never performed.....

C ...the situation that so easily besets us to this very day, a situation that we created - - - there is that kind of a problem, and don't you ever forget it!

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Y I'm numbered among those who look with great appreciation upon the President Emeritus of our Synod, Dr. J. Frank Fife. And in moments when I beat a path to his door for pastoral counsel and advice, I picked up on occasion a little gem or two that continue to hold me in good stead. I recall so readily right now how we were talking about the pastors and their problems. And out of his wisdom and experience he simply said, "There are some men, no matter where they move, and no matter where they serve, who have problems just because they create them." Any man who works with personnel knows exactly what Dr. Fife means - - - there are people who have the unhappy faculty of creating problems, just by the accent in their voice, just by their own fumbling, just by their own evil intent.

But I'm not particularly concerned right now about the problems that we ourselves have created for ourselves, deliberately or through our stupidity or our folly. But I'm also thinking of the problems that we create through our ignorance. Take as an example these primary urges of ours: there's the driving force to hate, to fear, to fight, to withdraw. Who isn't governed by them? But at some poine in our life we look back and we took the wrong turn. We never quite intended it that way, but we simply end up suffering the tor-

ments of the damned. Where can we find promised release? Who can show us the first step away from the oppression? We become soul-sick. It's one thing to be able to treat the body of a man, but who can treat his soul? Is there a balm for Gilead? - - is there a medicine for the heart?

Shakespeare's Macbeth - - you remember, don't you? - - has a voice that becomes a lament that speaks for everyman:

" MACBETH: How does your patient, doctor?

DOCTOR: Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.

MACBETH: Cure her of that:
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain'
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

It's that burden, you see, that burden upon the heart that impedes us, the strain and the stress of it all, whatever specifically it may be that unsettles us, that troubles us.

I stand among you now as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. With all the ardor of my soul I do believe there is an answer for us. Job found the answer to his problem in the fear of the Lord. We come, centuries on the other side of Job, we are numbered among the children of the Light, we are God's children to whom Jesus Christ has come. I submit to you that in Jesus Christ we have the answer. Before this service is concluded you will hear these words - - you hear them every Sunday, but for shame upon all of us, we become immunized to them: "The peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus . . ."

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Let me sound every bit like an old-fashioned Gospel preacher, of which I would never any day want to be ashamed - - there is no peace for any man until he allows Jesus Christ to possess his soul. So as you drag yourself into a new decade, as you drag yourself into a new year, there will be no spring in your step until there is surrender to Jesus Christ. Job knew no peace whatsoever until he could say, With God, in Him there is understanding.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not so sure that your problem can be taken away. I'm not so sure but what tomorrow morning you'll still get up with a burden on your heart. But in and through Jesus Christ a man knows how to carry it. One of the most precious of all names ever to be given to anybody is Christo-pher. And you know the legend, don't you? - - Christ-bearer- - - and as a person takes Jesus Christ into his own heart he learns to carry the burdens of his own soul, the burdens of somebody else, and the burdens of the world. It was not for nought that Sunday after Sunday as we anticipated Christmas Day that we echoed the familiar words: "Into my heart, into my heart, into my heart, Lord Jesus; Come into my heart, Lord Jesus; come in today, come in to stay."

If you were to ask me to give you a recipe for the new year, I'd give you a very simple thing - - take fifteen minutes out of every twenty-four hours, just fifteen minutes, and quietly say to yourself,

"The problem is heavy, O Lord, It's more than I can carry, and especially that problem of sin that bogs me down. Take over, Jesus Christ. I surrender myself and my problem to you. I surrender my sin . . . "

...and then allow yourself to believe that Jesus Christ is honestly taking over.

And the transformation begins to set in from that point on, a measure of peace within yourself and a measure of peace with other people. And then as one being transformed and being buoyed up by the grace of God, you go out into the world, and you become absolutely amazed at the way you can help other people carry their problems.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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January 18, 1970

Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and
from Jesus Christ, His Son, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

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I would be numbered with those who honestly believe that age has something to say to us. It is reasonable to believe that anyone, all other things being equal, who has lived a bit longer than the rest of us, and who has traveled farther down the road, has seen things and experienced things that he can well afford to share with us to our good. Small wonder, then, that I should ask you to hear at the very beginning of this sermon the words of a man who some time ago marked his 80th birthday anniversary, and all the more interesting because he happens to be Bertrand Russell, who for more than fifty years of his life has been a professed atheist.

Someone asked Russell, on his 80th birthday, what he thought was the most important asset that a man could have in this life. Russell answered: "The root of the matter is a very simple and old-fashioned thing, a thing so simple that I am almost ashamed to mention it, for fear of the derisive smile with which wise cynics will greet my words. The thing I mean - - please forgive me for mentioning it - - is love, Christian love. If you feel this you have a motive for existence, a guide in action, a reason for courage, an imperative necessity for intellectual honesty - - and although you may not find happiness, you will never know the despair of those whose life is aimless and void of purpose" - - - so spoke the atheist, in praise of Christian love.

It's quite a thing when an atheist and a devout Christian, perhaps the most wonderful of all Christians who ever lived, can be in agreement. For now I call your attention to a gleaming from the Epistle for today, which serves as the text for this brief meditation, the words of the Apostle Paul:

"Let love be genuine"

...Bertrand Russell, an atheist, says what a man needs more than anything else is love, Christian love, that is...

...says the Apostle Paul in his words of advice to people,

"Have love, but be sure it is genuine."

Once I slept in the same house where I could hear the conversation taking place in another room between two young men. Said the one to the other, "Well, I guess it's happened to me -- I think I'm falling in love, and I think it's the real thing."

"How do you know?"

Says the Apostle Paul, love should be genuine. How can you tell when love is genuine, perfect and pure?

"And love, I often think of that,
The treasure of the earth,
How little they who use the coin
Have realized its worth.
'Twill pay all debts, enrich all hearts,
Will make all joys secure,
But love, to do its perfect work,
Must be sincere and pure."

...let love be genuine -- Christian love, that is -- let it be pure.

We're poverty-stricken in the English language. We only have one word for love, and it means pretty much whatever the user wants it to mean. In the lives

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and on the lips of some people, when a man is about to make love to a maiden, it can be a very sordid and a very sensual thing. On the other hand, when a person sacrifices himself completely to meet another's need, and he does it because he loves, he is dealing with the sublime. The word love can mean many things to different people. In the English language we're poverty-stricken because we have only one word.

The Greeks were far better than we. Let me very hurriedly give you a lesson in Greek -- not that it smacks of any erudition--heaven forbid -- I couldn't pass a Greek exam any better than you could, but I do remember certain words.

The Greeks had one word for it: EROS

...and by that they meant the love that a person had for a thing, an aim or an objective, and he pursued it patiently as long as he was thrilled in the pursuit of a dream, he was satisfied, he followed after it. As long as he had a relationship with a person, and that relationship was perfectly satisfying, he pursued it -- EROS -- an all-take kind of thing.

The Greeks had another word: PHILIA

...which is a give-and-take proposition, where a person became involved in another person's life because of mutual agreement -- "I will be your friend as long as you are my friend; when you are no longer my friend, I don't have to be your friend" "I will honor my part of the contract as long as you honor your part, but when you no longer honor

yours, I don't have to honor mine" -- a contractual kind of agreement, a give and take:

" -- and I'll give as long as I can take, and when I can no longer take, I won't give any longer -- "

Each of these kinds of love has something to be said in its behalf.

...the world is better off, quite frequently, because of people who continue to be satisfied in their pursuit of a dream, as long as it is noble....

...the world is better off as long as there can be people who have mutual agreement, and can be happy in that mutuality....

Each of these is good.

But each of these bows down in the light of being what one might refer to as true and genuine and perfect love.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He became involved in people's lives, involved because He discovered that they had a need to be met. There was something that He could do for them, even if it meant sacrificing His love to prove the point. The Greeks had never seen any kind of love quite like it, and they had to coin a brand new word: AGAPE

...self-sacrificing love, love that meets a need in another person's life.

There are some people, when they talk about love, deal only with the sordid and the sensual. A man or a woman -- it can work either way -- treats one another pretty much like a rag-doll....you play with it, and when you're fed up with it you drop it and go away.

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There are some people for whom love is like water that flows through a tap. They think it can be turned on and off at will. But that isn't Christian love. There is a difference.

Christian love is unending, it's constant, it's geared to only one kind of motivation -- an obligation to meet the need in another person's life. This is the extraordinary thing about the Christian religion. It holds before all of us this kind of standard.

Christian love means obligation. Today we come to the altar to receive the Sacrament. It's possible because God-come-to-us-in-Jesus Christ has done for us what we could not do for ourselves - - - God-comes-to-us-in-Christ remains constant in meeting the need in our lives. Let us therefore come joyfully, for we are the ones who are being loved. And that accounts for the difference in our lives. We are the loved ones.

Now to properly receive the Sacrament, once you have turned your back on the altar, whatever love that motivates and guides your life, if it's to have its Christian accent, should give you a sense of re-direction, perchance a renewal, and restoration.

What the world needs most - - - love - - - Christian love, that is....

...and even an atheist has lived long enough

to be able to admit it.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - The Rev. David R. Shaheen
January 4, 1970

GOD, As we stand today on the threshold of the year, we ask Your help for the days that lie ahead. We cannot tell what awaits us, not even a day ahead. Make us sure of this one thing, that whatever comes, we will never need to face it alone, for you will be with us.

Bless those for whom the days ahead will be lonelier, those from whom death has taken away someone who was very near, and for whom life will be lonelier than it used to be. Help them in spite of everything still to face life with steady eyes.

Bless those for whom life will be more difficult than it was, those whom illness has left less able to meet the strenuous demands of life, those for whom the weight of the years is heavier now, and for whom everything is more of an effort than it once was. Help them still to walk and not to faint.

Bless those who will have to shoulder heavier responsibilities, at home or at work, and who wonder if they can do it. Send them the strength with the task.

Bless those who in this year have to make difficult decisions, and who will stand at some cross-roads in life. Give them guidance, and give them strength to accept it.

Bless those who will be tempted to dishonor or to dishonesty. And bless those who by their mistakes in the past have made life in the present and in the future more difficult than it need have been, and in whose hearts is regret. Give those who will be tempted strength to resist evil, and to do the right. And give grace to those who have fallen still to redeem themselves.

Bless those who look forward to the year ahead, those who have great plans for their work, those who hope to complete some task or some course of study, those who plan to marry, and those into whose home there will come a little child.

Bless Your Church, and give her gentleness of heart, certainty of faith and strength of action.

Bless our country and give to us leaders who themselves are led to devotion to justice and mercy.

Remember with Your blessing those from whom we are separated for a time, and all the circle of those most dear.

Hear now, O God, the special requests of our hearts

OUR FATHER . . .

~~EROS~~ EROS PHILIA AGAPÉ
(eros) (philia) agape
Bertrand Russell, on his 80th birthday, after

a half century of atheism, was asked what he thought
was the most important asset he thought a man
could have in this life. He answered: "The root of the
matter," he declared, "is a very simple and well-fashioned
thing, a thing so simple that I am almost
ashamed to mention it, for fear of the ^{derisive} ~~derisive~~ smile
with which wise cynics will greet my words."

The thing I mean - please forgive me for
mentioning it - is love, Christian love.
If you feel this you have a motive for existence,
a guide in action, a reason for courage, an
imperative necessity for intellectual honesty -- and
although you may not find happiness, you will
never know the despair of those whose life is
aimless and void of purpose" —

February 1, 1970

"Reflections on a Text:"
11 corinthians 12:8-9

There are so many voices coming at us these days, O
God, perchance in this place we might be able to
hear an echo of Your voice, even now. Amen.

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If you want to know whether or not a man really has a short fuse, say
to him sometime, "Why don't you grow up?" If it's one thing that some of
us know a measure of pride in, it's in the concept that we have of ourselves,
that we're no longer childish, that we have matured.

But how can you tell whether or not a person has matured? A number of
years ago that man Overstreet made a small fortune for himself. His volume,
"The Mature Man" sold hundreds of thousands, as people were discovering that
they were not as mature in their thinking as they thought they were.

There are of course different levels of maturity.

A person matures physically - - there isn't any one among us who doesn't
understand that. And it can be said very quickly that this maturation process
at any level can be for some people a very painful process - - for some people
maturing physically is a painful thing.

It's not easy for some people to mature emotionally. We know a measure
of security when we can hang on to our prejudices, which are downright child-
ish, and for some people it's a very exasperating thing, and almost a trau-
matic experience, to grow up emotionally, to get rid of their fears, and of
their attitudes. Some people never quite grow up, emotionally.

There are some people who never mature spiritually. How can you tell
whether or not a person has matured spiritually? Last year when we gave
ourselves, at least a number of groups here in the parish, to studying con-

firmation and First Communion. In one way or another they were dealing with this very subject -- at what age should a person be confirmed in the Christian faith?

You have heard it said many times that the Church believes that when a person reaches the age of reason, that he be given a chance to stand up publicly and profess his faith in Jesus Christ and to make it known that he wants that expression of faith in Jesus Christ to be channeled through the Church. ~~But~~ There was one man in particular who constituted a part of that study group and made a significant contribution in many ways. And his was a solitary voice at times when he said, "Is it right that we should take a group of youngsters of one chronological age, funnel them through a particular process, and then say to every single one of them, 'You are now ready to be confirmed' -- it does not automatically follow that just because a person has reached a certain age chronologically, that he has reached a certain spiritual level."

He came up with what for some people was a very revolutionary idea -- that if it's possible for the pastor to know his young people, that he deal with them on an individual basis, and when he discovers that this youngster has a measure of understanding of Christian truth and response to the Lordship of Christ as his Saviour -- then when this happens, no matter when it may be chronologically, when it happens as you can say, precisely, spiritually, then let that person be confirmed then and there. Now what do you think of that?

My brother-in-law once served as a Baptist preacher in Boston, and he told me of the congregation of that church, where the pastor made much of the fact that there was to be a baptism every Sunday night -- he geared and designed his worship services and he preached so that at least one unconverted soul would be found at least once a week, and that person would come forward and present himself for the conversion experience which was expressed in adult baptism -- believer's baptism, if you please.

How can you tell when a person is spiritually mature?

Let me suggest at least two things. One, I think in order to say that you have matured spiritually you have to be the kind of a person who is willing to admit that your encounter in life has brought you to your knees, that you've made the discovery that life can be too much for you. Some people never discover it. Oh, they ~~stumble~~ fumble and they falter and they fail, but they never call it by its rightful name, and they don't know what's happened.

I've just come back from meetings of the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America. The sessions were not at all unusual. Every time we gather we have problems, problems, problems. One man stood up before the Council and said, let's just face it - - we have nothing but an obstacle course to run! Well, that's a good reading of life. Life is an obstacle course that has to be run! and eventually a man must make the discovery, in one way or another, that there are periods when there are burdens that have to be carried and problems that have to be reckoned with and obstacles that just can't be avoided!.....and the sum total of the result may be that it's too much for us.

God never made any man big enough to handle all of life by himself. And I'm inclined to believe that the first mark of spiritual maturation is when a man admits this, either because he's forced to admit it, or he makes the discovery on his own.

This was the kind of thing that I think our Blessed Lord was trying to establish firmly in the minds of anybody who would come after Him. You remember how He put it - - Let me give you a free translation: "If you want to be my followers, if you want to walk in my way, let me tell you in the very beginning that there will be burdens that you will have to carry, there will

be problems that you will have to solve, and that there will be thrust upon you the burden of all mankind." The classic expression as recorded in the Scriptures is this:

"If a man will come after me, let
him take up his cross daily, and
follow me"

But wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this was the only thing that had to be said or could be said? - - that life can be too much for us. Isn't it a terrible thing if you and I should come to the end of our journey, completely exhausted and as a person who collapsed under the weight of the burden that was thrust upon him? - - and who never quite knew what to do with the obstacle in front of him? Wouldn't that be a terrible thing? That's why we Christians of all people are the most fortunate.

And the second thing that's characteristic of anybody who has matured spiritually, he discovers that he has resources, that he can be made adequate to the burdens that he has to carry, he can discover by the grace of God that there is a way through, if not around, the problem. And that's no small thing.

If you know your Latin at all, you know what that word religion means - - religio, religionis -- to be bound to.....for the Christian he's always bound to God! God through the Holy Spirit becomes the Enabler and the source of strength.

I don't know how casually you listened to that longest of all the Epistle lessons in the course of the church year. It was read admirably for us today by our lesson reader. It was the account of one man who happened to be a tent-repairman, who had his obstacle course to run. And after he lists any number of obstacle courses and reminds us of them, he ends by saying that he discovers that the grace of God could be sufficient, and that even in his weakness he

could be made strong.

So I stand before you now, earnestly coveting for you as I would for myself, an increasing degree of spiritual maturation, recognition of the weight of the burden, the recognition of the strength that comes through God to see you through. Would ~~h~~ you believe me if I were to tell you that that's precisely why there are some people who keep coming back to this place Sunday after Sunday - - - because they honestly believe without the kind of thing that God gives them here, they couldn't possibly face the Monday that's certain to come.

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(Transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
Quinquagesima Sunday - Sunday, February 8, 1970

O GOD, You are Love. You want us to be like Yourself. Help us to love each other as You love each one of us.

GRANT US, O GOD, the patience which will defend us against all irritability; the self-control which will keep us from all bursts of temper; the ability to forgive, even when we are injured, insulted, and hurt.

O GOD, grant us the heart which will make us feel the sorrows and the need and the troubles of others as keenly as our own, the eye which is quick to see the needs of others, the hand which is just as quick to help them, the mind which always thinks the best of others, and never the worst, the spirit which no matter what is done to it, would never know any bitterness, will never hate, and will always love.

O GOD, grant us the humility which never thinks of its own feelings, its own place and its own prestige, the memory which refuses to remember and to brood on insults and injuries, the spirit which forgives as it hopes to be forgiven; from the touchiness which is too quick to take offense, from the memory which nurses the remembrance of bitterness, from the tongue which is too quick to speak in criticism or in anger, from the desire for revenge and the wish to get our own back.

SAVE US, O GOD, from the love which is fickle and changeable, from the love which is too dominating and possessive, from the love which is too sentimental and which has no discipline in it, save us, O God.

HELP US always to love the unloving, even when there is no response, to love the unlovable which will awaken beauty where there once was none, to love the unloved and to bring light and warmth to lives which are lonely and out in the cold.

WHEN bitterness threatens to invade our hearts, and when we feel that we have much to bear and resentment rises within us, when we feel it difficult to forgive, help us to see again the figure of our Blessed Lord, living and dying in incomparable love.

Grant that in His risen power He may help us to love as He loved, that all men may know that we belong to Him.

OUR FATHER.....

February 8, 1970

" - - AND - - LOVE"
(I Corinthians 13:13)

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There are times when I just can't take it. Then occasionally, rare indeed, there does come a moment when I feel up to it, and I brace myself for the nauseating experience of reading the copy in the ads on the page of the newspaper that describes either the coming attractions or the pictures being currently shown in some of our motion picture theaters.

How did the ad read not so long ago? - - with all the supporting descriptions: "Love - Italian Style"

....I didn't go to see the movie....hadn't planned to.

In fact, I'd read enough about love Italian style, and I think I know what it must be like....

Then there was the copy ad for the motion picture: "Love - American Style"

.....didn't go to see the movie....hadn't planned to.

In fact, I think I know enough about the kind of love they talk about when they describe love American style - - I have been listening in on human hearts for over three decades, and I know the kind of defilement and the destruction of personality that passes off for love American style.....

There's variety in the titles, you see, indicating that there's more than one kind of love, more than one kind of style pattern.

Centuries ago there was an itinerant soul who made his living mending tents. I presume he didn't make much money because he'd much rather talk and

write than take a needle in his hand and mend his tents. He wandered around from place to place - - he saw a great deal of life. Name any port, name any town along the Mediterranean, and he had either been there, planning to visit it, or knew somebody who was there.

One day he decided to visit the town called Corinth. He stayed there, presumably as long as he could, until he got his belly-full. Corinth was a very wealthy city, and at the cross-roads of the world. And along with its wealth it had its corresponding wickedness. It became very obvious to him as he stayed there that in Corinth there was love - - Corinthian Style!

Up there was the hill, the Acropolis. It had a sacred temple, the temple to the goddess of love, Aphrodite. The temple was served by priests and priestesses. They had a thousand women who served as female priests. The truth of the matter is, they were sacred prostitutes.....and if you can stomach the expression, they were willing to work overtime. So when their day's work was done on the Acropolis, they went down into the city of Corinth and plied their trade.....so much so, that there was a by-word in Corinth in those days that it takes a pretty big man to be able to stand a visit to Corinth. And all the sensuality and all the sexuality was passed off in the name of love.

Love - - Corinthian-style.....

Love - - American-style.....

Love - - Italian-style.....

...there are many different kinds of
love.....there are different levels of love.

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Well, that tent-mender-turned-preacher felt terribly constrained to set those people straight in their thinking on love. When he went away from Corinth he kept thinking about it and one day he wrote them a letter. He wrote a letter to a group of Christians who lived in Corinth. They were in the minority, but he wrote them a letter. In fact, one whole chapter in the letter that he wrote, the first letter that he wrote to them, is a magnificent hymn of love, the greatest thing of its kind ever to come through the mind of man. He felt in duty bound to set those Corinthians straight in their thinking on love. So he came up with the wonderful thing called Love - - Christian-style. You find thirteen verses that tell about what love was meant to be in the mind of God.

Quite frankly, you've caught it already, haven't you? My intention in coming to this sacred desk is to straighten out our thinking on this great and wonderful subject called love. Let me recite it for you again:

"And love, I often think of that,
The treasure of the earth,
'Twill pay all debts, enrich all hearts,
'Twill make all joy sublime,
But love, to do its perfect work
Must be sincere, and pure."

For the most part we labor under a great number of either incomplete or misconceptions of love. We use the word entirely too easily, cheaply, recklessly. I stay out of the way as much as I can of our Director of Youth Ministry. Occasionally I pay him a visit in his office. And when I go there it's like a breath of spring blowing in on me. He's attractively used color on his walls. And this is a great day for posters. If you wanted to you could take a peek into his room this morning, perhaps, and you'll find it bedecked with posters. I'm sorry that you won't see the one now that served

as a kind of background for the sermon.....

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...I went there last night to look at it. It happens to be missing. It's a poster that had one word on it, a four-letter word -- LOVE. The poster had only two people -- that's right, a man and a woman. They were embracing each other. They were standing on the shore of the sea, and there alongside of them was the expanse of water. I think I remember correctly when I say there wasn't a cloud in the sky. I can understand why I could be thrilled and you could be thrilled with whatever romantic blood continues to course through your veins, as you would stand and look at this picture. It tells a great deal.

For love is identification, the lover and the beloved -- two people on the face of the earth who happen to meet and feel toward each other as they can't possibly feel toward any other person.....two people who experience fulfillment only as they look into each other's eyes.

I watched a film on television some time ago. It was called The Stripper, the story of a gal who earned her money that way. It had a very interesting beginning, cleverly done. The first scenes of the motion picture are a tour director, taking a group of tourists around Hollywood, and they're all eyes, fascinated by the city and by its personalities. He pointed out that this person that they happen to see on the street is the distinguished actor or actress....with their own eyes they see her for the first time. And the first shots go on like this, this unfolding of distinguished personalities. And then someone, I suppose on the third seat from the front on the bus, says to the tour director, as she spots a gal going into a drug store, honestly believing that she, too, must be somebody, says, "And who is she?" The tour director says, "She's nobody." The rest of the film

deals with how this Nobody eventually becomes Somebody, and she becomes somebody because one day she meets someone who identifies with her and lifts her up, and clothes her with the dignity of personhood. For the first time in her life, Nobody becomes Somebody.

.....well, of course that's what that poster is saying to me. As two people look into each other's eyes, the lover and the beloved, each one is somebody special.

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But I make bold to suggest to you, that if that isn't a misconception of love, then it's most certainly an incomplete conception of love. For love in its fullest expression is never to be understood as two people simply looking into each other's eyes. Some of us could not live if we didn't have the assurance that this could happen. But if I were an artist, I'd propose a sequel to that poster, a companion. I'd paint the sky black, with threatening clouds. I'd so paint the waves of the sea that you could almost hear them roar, indicating the sea and the stress and the turmoil of life. And I'd turn the eyes of the lover and the beloved from each other.....and I'd have them together face an angry world, still clenching their hands -- this I would never take from them, but together they would be facing something over, above, beyond themselves. This is a better understanding of love. I have reason to tell you that sometimes the most selfish thing in the world is what some people experience as their love -- they never see beyond themselves.

There are several other things I'd like to say to you about either an incomplete or a misconception of love. I've lived long enough to honestly believe that love is never something that just happens. There are always the antecedent forces at work, like the winds that are abroad throughout the

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world that are going to catch you up and throw you in a certain direction - - so when the moment-of-moments comes in your life, and when you're able to walk away from it and honestly believe that it's the real thing - - it has never been something that's just happened. Forces prefatory for that moment have been at work. And with all the ardor of my soul, if I could do it, I would say to those who are young, prepare yourself now for the moment, the looming on the horizon, of what could be your Prince Charming, of what could be your adorable soul. It never just happens.

Another misconception or incomplete understanding of love is, that it takes care of itself. It just doesn't take care of itself. I remember my first and only visit to Fort Knox, years ago - - greatly impressed that as I arrived there - - the security. And I said to myself, there must be something there that's worth guarding. In the language of the Church, in the marriage ceremony, it's spelled out excellently - -

" - - and keep thee only unto her - - "

" - - and keep thee only unto him - - "

...it takes a bit of doing to keep in love and to stay in love.

In the series of questions that I've prepared through experience with those who come to me in anticipation of their wedding day, in the first interview, there's the list of questions. And eventually I come to this one: And why do you think your marriage will succeed? I'm still having my ears ring with the perfect answer that came with the last interview I had this week. Whether she said it first or he said it first, I can't quite tell you, maybe it came as one voice: "Because we intend to work at it. We intend to see that it succeeds."

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So I've shared with you very quickly some common misconceptions of love, some incomplete conceptions of love. For love has a variety of styles and patterns. That tent-mender-turned-preacher talked about Love - Christian-style. Read those thirteen verses for yourself and you'll discover that every verb is an active verb - - - a love that's doing something. Occasionally profanity can be perceptive. I'm not about to use the profane expression that I saw on a poster once, but I'd like to let you know just how perceptive it really was. If you want to, you can supply the profanity for yourself. The poster simply read:

LOVE IS A _____ OF A LOT OF WORK

It is. Read again that 13th chapter, the way the Apostle Paul put it....

...it's something that's patient...

...it's something that is not arrogant....

....it's something that isn't boastful....

...it's something that never thinks of itself....

...it's something that always has a total concern for somebody else...

....it's something that's always everlastingly working for the
good of somebody else.....

....it's something that's always going on in spite of the return
that may never come to you.....

....this is love - - Christian-style.

I ask myself quickly the question, is it possible for us humans to love as God loves us? From a purely human point of view, with all the honesty of my soul, I'm not so sure that it is. But because we are people redeemed by Jesus Christ we can be lifted above a mere human level, and we're intended to become channels of God's love, we're to allow God's love to possess us, to allow God's love to work through us. That's the only way it's possible. Have you ever tried it? Whatever good remains in this wicked world, is because there have been those who have. * * * (Transcribed as recorded)

"MAKE TIME - TAKE TIME"

Through Jesus Christ Thy Son,
Our Lord. Amen.

Perhaps you'd be interested in knowing what the first words were that I heard spoken at the Parsonage this morning. The words were the voice of a radio announcer as the clock-radio came on. He was bringing to us, fresh in the morning, a commercial. And the words went something like this, as he represented a restaurant chain in the fast-food industry:

"We can serve you a complete meal-for-four-
people in 30 seconds"

I have no quarrel with the fast-food industry as such. But the important thing about a meal is never how fast you can get it, nor how quickly you can consume it. I had a friend who used to say to me, and he liked good food -- that was beside the point -- but he used to say to me, "It isn't the food, it's the people with whom you eat it."

We have a member of this congregation who is a daughter among six or seven sons. She looks back over the days of her childhood and her growing up into maturity, and one of the very fine and precious memories of her home life comes through the thought that when the father went off to work in the morning, it was only at eventide that they saw him when he came for the supper meal.....and he ruled the house gloriously, as a father ought to rule a household. No one spoke while others were speaking, no one left the

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table until all were finished. And for her the highlight of the day, as she remembers it now, was that the father gave every single youngster in the family a chance to talk and to tell about any exciting thing that happened to him or to her in the course of the day. They took time to eat. The precious thing about a meal is the relationship that goes on while you share it.

I have a running quarrel with the publication society of the Lutheran Church. It's a running quarrel that goes on in my own mind.....they don't know anything about it because I won't permit myself to be stupid enough to write. But they publish devotional material, and they take pride in the fact that it's simply reading a page a day that might take you a little more than a minute to read. Some years ago they even published a devotional book by the interesting title: "Two Minutes A Day With God" - - as though we could cut it that thin, cut it that short. So obsessed have we become with the notion that you've got to save time, you've got to cut corners, you've got to do it quick!

The thing that I would submit to you tonight is that we ought to master the fine art of making time last - - learning how to stretch it - - learning how to use it wisely and well, rather than to make it pass all too quickly.

Some years ago there was a visitor to this part of the world from the Far East, and the New Yorker was showing him around, and as they headed up Madison Avenue he said, "Now, if we cross at this point and go up a block, we can save five minutes"....to which the Easterner very properly replied, "And what will we do with the five minutes once we have saved it?"

Did it ever occur to you that time is the only thing that's really uniquely yours? - - aside from the gift of life which God has bestowed upon you. The way you use time - - the way you pace yourself, the way you give yourself to priorities, the way you desire to make it stretchthis is the unique contribution that you bring to God's exceedingly precious gift to you which is time.

I don't hesitate to remind you what I've told you before, that in the liturgy of our Lutheran Church, there are many things that bring my soul to attention, one especially. The officiating minister says to you, once you've confessed your sins, the Declaration of Grace:

"The Almighty and merciful God grant you,
being penitent, pardon and remission of
all your sins, time for amendment of life - - "

We need to master the fine art of knowing how to use time, wisely, and well. To make time - - to take time. For there are some things that can be learned only as time has been allowed to have its free course.

Throughout the day as people have marked the path that leads to this house, when I have had the good fortune to conduct the service, I have been reading a passage from the Gospel according to Luke, it's the 15th chapter, which in essence constitutes three stories told by our Blessed Lord, three stories around a common theme: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and the lost son. You readily recognize the story of the Prodigal.

If I had a pencil in my hand there's an expression that I would underline very quickly. It deals with what happens to the Prodigal in the far country....

....you remember the Prodigal, don't you? He was the original one of the Now generation. He was 'uptight' with things at

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home. He had his hang-ups, and he just couldn't wait until he could get far enough away. He had a wise father, who allowed his own heart to be broken, but because he was wise he allowed the son to go. For there are some things that the son would have to learn for himself as time would pass. Nothing this side of Heaven could get the truth through the head of this son, who whether he knew it or not, was Hell-bent for destruction. So the father allowed him to go - - there you get it: "In the far country," the Good Book says, " - - at last - - and when he came to himself - - "...which simply means, time had to run its course - - certain lessons had to be learned.....

Take time - - make time - - to discover fundamental truths.

The Church Fathers decided wisely. The Church Fathers have said to us, take 40 days, 40-days-plus-6 before Easter - - make time - - take the time, to discover anew the fundamental truth that God loves us, and that God was willing to give His Son Jesus Christ to prove the point. The Church Fathers decided wisely - - take the time. Set aside the season before Easter to discover this truth.

I've always had a high regard for Roman Catholicism. At some distance, of course, I could look at it. One of the things that I felt they really had going for them which we Protestants never fully understood was the confessional, where an individual penitent goes into a booth and takes time to be quiet - - takes time to name his sins specifically -- no blanket cover-

age here.....and he names his sins specifically, he takes time to do it. And in God's wonderful world of ours he finds one person, on the other side of the confessional booth, who takes time to listen. Then, as God's special agent, the words of forgiveness are given.

...but is that the end of it? In this day of unsettlement in the Roman Catholic Church I hope they haven't lost this, where invariably the priest would offer a kind of 'spiritual prescription' in which he would suggest, recommend, that before the penitent left the church he took time to do the Stations of the Cross. And what where the Stations of the Cross? - - - pictures, statues, carvings, that brought to remembrance the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrow that was walked, that was trod, by Jesus Christ until the moment when He became the Crucified One.....

The penitent was being encouraged to take time to discover all over again how wonderful God's love is, and how much God was willing to pay to prove the wonder of His love.

So we begin today to take time, to make time, to discover all over again how much God loves us. And that is the meaning of Lent.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

February 15, 1970

"In The Confused Tumult of Life:
I "WHAT DOES IT MEAN?" (Luke 18:36)

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It is Your voice that we want most
to hear now, O God, no matter how
faint nor feeble nor frail the
echo -- let it be Your voice. Amen.

There's more than one way to evaluate a civilization, a culture of a people. For our purpose this morning let me suggest this rather extraordinary and certainly unusual one for you. I'm making bold to suggest that you can judge a civilization by the way its people go to bed at night.

By way of contrast, by what we've heard, of course, this is the way it must have been a hundred years ago....

...the majority of Americans lived in smaller communities; the trend toward the cities had not yet begun. Life was simple, life was rural, life was pastoral. In the villages no doubt most houses were darkened by 11:00 o'clock at night ...hardly anyone on the street at that hour. By 11:00 o'clock at night the fires would have been banked, the coal or the wood put into the pot-bellied stove or the furnace, the draft properly adjusted, the damper set, the oil lamps extinguished ...one still shivering a bit, perhaps, from the cold room, if it were winter, in which one slept. When morning came, there were those who would say, so we're told, they would almost have to break the ice in the pitcher, in the basin, in order to wash

in the morning....

...but it was the way they went to bed at night....the newspaper, quaint by our standards, had been crumpled and put aside.....and if there was some kind of conversation between the man and the wife, it might have been the morsel of gossip that remained, transmitted buggy-to-buggy as they passed on the way from the mill, the shop, the mine, or the village store.....and off to bed they went -- not reaching so much as for an aspirin, and surely not a buffered one!

How different last night for some of us!

A concern about the weather, because we did listen to the news reports, you know, and we suffer, and I use the word advisedly, from a kind of 'news addiction' -- some of us can't possibly go to bed at night until after the 10:00 or 11:00 o'clock news. So we go to bed against that background.

And what kind of a back-ground is it? It's a very troubled one, for all the unsettlement of life, brought into our den, into our bedroom, into our living room, as it's sucked from the world outside, from the ether waves, by the antenna of either television or radio. It's rather sordid, it's ugly -- rape....murder...strike...hostility....war.....

....it's against that background that we go to bed.

I can readily understand why that good man of the faith, for whom I will carry even until the day that I die nothing but profound regard, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, once told me, within the past five years, how when he

went to bed at night he hardly had enough courage to ask God to give him enough energy the next morning to get up and face another day, because he knew what he'd passed through the day before.

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Is there any Christian posture against that today? Caught up in the sea of unsettlement and turmoil, do we have to go to bed at night a bundle of nerves and shaking, literally shaking, by the disturbance of the soul? Well, here's how one Christian family resolved it. It may not be your cup of tea, but perhaps it ought to be....

...the late news is turned on only after a moment of prayer. The entire family centers down with something like this:

"O God, for what we are now to see and to hear, enlarge our compassion, disclose Your will in today's history, and put us to work and to witness in that history ourselves . . . "

...the key line, of course, is "disclose Your will in today's history"....

Now it takes a bit of doing, I say it very quickly, to discover any element of God in all the turmoil and unsettlement of our day....

...it's the finger of man that's writing in large bold print....

...it's man who engineers his way to the moon....

...it's man who creates and designs the latest missile, who creates and designs the latest aircraft, it's man who creates and designs the elements of histility....

...for they tell us we are a maneuvered and we are a manipulated people...

...it's man who decides where the next battle is going to be

fought, and how long the engagement, and what the total number of casualties ought to be....

Is it then possible to be able to discern the finger of God in the unsettlement of the day?

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These Sunday mornings during Lent I want to call your attention to last Sunday's Gospel lesson. And last Sunday's Gospel lesson will indicate for us something of the tumult of our day. Let me remind you of what happened in that Gospel lesson of last Sunday. It's about as intriguing and as fascinating a page as you'll find in the New Testament, aside from all the great things that happened in the last week of our Saviour's life. In fact, it was the beginning of that last week, almost so, when in that 18th chapter of Luke you have Jesus Christ saying,

"Alright, I'm going to go to Jerusalem."

...His last journey there. And on His way to Jerusalem He passes through a town called Jericho. And as He gets into Jericho there's a great wave of excitement. The word begins to spread that the "Carpenter's-Son-Turned-Preacher" is coming our way"...and when they mentioned His name, they remembered that His reputation was such that He was a controversial figure -- that's what people said about Him. And He was quite a preacher, too. And in addition to that, they said He could work miracles....and not only that, it had been implied that He was on His way to Jerusalem and something terrible was going to take place. So who knows, the people may have reasoned to themselves, it may be in Jericho that He'll work another miracle -- it may be in Jericho that He'll make a 'position statement.'

Well, it wasn't business as usual in Jericho that day when Jesus came near. It was a day of much excitement. People were pushing and shoving,

jostling and yelling, and everybody seemed to have been caught up in it except one man, by the side of the road.

His name was Bartimaeus. He was a blind beggar.

"And hearing the multitude pass by,"

...the Good Book says,

"he asks, what does this mean?"

Little does Bartimaeus realize, perhaps, how important his question actually was, but at least he was asking the right question. Little did he realize how wonderful would be the answer that he would eventually get.

But for shame upon many of us, we never reach the point that blind Bartimaeus the beggar did, because hearing the multitude pass by, being caught up somehow, in the backlash of all the excitement and turmoil of that day, he says, "What does it mean?" So I submit to you today that we ought to ask the question -- this unsettlement that heckles us and leaves us completely distraught just to reckon with it -- is there any meaning whatsoever? It's a wise man who asks the right question. He may not always be able to understand the answer that's given, but to be able to ask the right question, What does it mean? Does life in all its turmoil and unsettlement as we know it today have any meaning whatsoever? Bertrand Russell, who just died, said "Absolutely not!" -- and that's the way he lived and that's the way he died.

During these days of Lent you and I are going to be concentrating upon a figure in history, a lonely figure. And the Church very properly says, Behold this man who was caught up in all the unsettlement of his day, and all the hostilities. He was determined to find meaning in it, and through it, and despite it. So he did.

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That day in Jericho a blind man found God in all the excitement of that day. When you and I find ourselves caught up in the upheavals of life, at whatever level it may be, with all the ardor of my soul I urge you to look to see if there's any meaning in it, and if perchance the meaning could be found in God.

As some of you know, I've thoroughly enjoyed, since last September, taking the Bible in my hand, reading it as though I have never read it before, page by page, chapter by chapter, book by book, and now that I'm just about to finish the Old Testament, I classify the Bible as "seeing the world from the divine perspective, seeing it from God's point of view" -- and what unsettled days they were!

In the unsettlement of life that you and I may have, let me reduce it to the closest personal relationships: the upheavals that you may have between yourself and your wife, upheavals that you may have between yourself as a parent and your child, the upheaval that you may have between yourself and your neighbor, the person who works in the same office -- whatever may be the nature and the character of the upheaval of the unsettlement in which it could be characterized that life now becomes a jostling and a pushing and a shoving -- and even a shouting -- take time out to say, -- perchance -- perchance God's in this thing!

Sagacious indeed is the word for the man who said that when he was caught up in the turmoil of life he tried to quiet his mind long enough to see if he could just find out where the fact of God was, and then to move over in that direction. Now, there's something to think about.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

O GOD, This Day we have listened to Your Word, we have been instructed in Your truth, we have sung Your praise, we have talked with You in prayer. Now, O God, send us out in Your strength to all the duties and the tasks of this life.

Send us out with a faith so confirmed that it cannot be shaken; with a hope so sure that no event in the world and no personal experience can drive it to despair; with a will so fortified and resolution so sure that no temptation may overcome us; with a love so deep that nothing may ever again seduce us from out loyalty to Jesus our Lord.

Send us out, O God, conscious of the unseen witnesses who surround us, united with each other in Jesus Christ, committed in flesh to live with those who have been with Jesus.

Send us out, O God, to live graciously in our homes, to serve diligently at our work, to find joy with purity and pleasure, to bring credit to the name we bear in every situation of this life, to live so that man may see the beautiful things we do and give the glory to You.

Send us out, O God, to live in respect for ourselves, in concern for others, in obedience to You. Grant that it may not be for nothing that we have worshipped here today. Keep our minds from forgetting what we've heard, and our wills from faltering in our resolution to obey.

Help us to go from this place with the light of hope in our eyes, the knowledge of Your truth in our minds, the flame of Your love in our hearts.

OUR FATHER.....

February 22, 1970

"In The Confused Tumult of Life:
II "WHAT DO YOU WANT?" (Luke 18:41)

- God's outstretched hand, while never empty, holds some things of greater value than others. We must name - we must choose.

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It was the day of the week when the art teacher was expected to come to that particular grade. This time when she came she brought with her a collection of the masterpieces. The one that she happened to hold in her hand in front of the class now was the picture of Whistler's Mother. You remember it, don't you, the kind and gentle soul seated there in the rocking chair, with head erect and faced forward, dressed undoubtedly in black with white lace trim (perhaps we'd much prefer it to have been lavender-and-lace).....

...."Johnny," she said, "What does this picture remind you of?"

Johnny's reply was immediate - - "A nice old lady, waiting for the repair man to bring back her TV set."

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Art Linkletter-fashion, we say, "Kids say the darndest things!" - - that restrained chuckle, you see, we can afford it only for a moment. For in this place of sober reflection we do well to honestly ask ourselves, could it be that the little boy's reaction constitutes an indictment against us, our day and our culture? Are we allowing children to believe that as soon as the television tube is burned out, that we have to sit there completely immobilized and stare into space? Are we allowing a youngster to believe that ours is an age where people simply sit and look, and in a very detached kind of way look at the world out there, so far removed from us, as though it had no meaning for us whatsoever?

So I pose for you the question with all the ardor that becomes a proclaimer of the Word of God - - is this the kind of impression we're creating upon the minds of those who are young?

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I submit to you this morning that God never made any of us, according to His divine intention, to sit back and look at life in a detached way, to sit down and to stare at something as though it had no meaning for us whatsoever. I would not suggest the symbol for our day, precious as grandma is, as someone sitting in a rocking chair and just waiting, uninvolved and detached. But if you want a symbol as I think God would have us understand it, come along with me and push back the curtain of time. Go all the way back, as you turn the pages of the New Testament, to a day in Jericho.

There was a carpenter's son, if you please, who decided to become a preacher, and He took to the road. He traveled much, He traveled often. Yet it could be said when His ministry was completed, He never got as far as a hundred miles from home base.

That day in Jericho He was beginning His final trek, His last little journey to Jerusalem. And as He entered Jericho there was a great deal of excitement, and understandably so. For word had gotten around that He was coming that way....

...for three years, now, He had been going around in a peripatetic fashion, telling people the good word, which was a different word about God and this world and man. They'd never heard preaching like that, so the reputation preceded him as a preacher....

...and He was known in certain places to do acts of wonder - - so

the word got around in Jericho that the miracle-worker was coming their way....

...and as over against all of that, He was, my friend, a troubler of the establishment....

C ...now put all three of them together, and if that isn't enough to draw a crowd and to engender a measure of excitement, I don't know what is. And business was not as usual that day on the main street in Jericho - - a great deal of excitement, tumult, confusion.

O Now look at what's by the side of the road. Seemingly detached, seemingly immobilized, there's a blind man. He's a beggar....off to the side of the road.

P But God never made anyone to stay on the side of the road forever. God never intended that we were to be there just to stare as everything else goes by. So I would hold in front of us now the symbol of the blind beggar, whose behavioral pattern can be indicative of what God intends of every man.

Y To begin with, the beggar man is made aware of the nearness of God. He senses something going on. He doesn't quite understand what it is, so he cries out, "What goes on there? What does this mean?" - -

...and the answer as we dealt with it in last Sunday's sermon on that passage of Scripture that's the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, to which we'll keep referring these Sunday mornings during Lent....the answer came back, "Jesus of Nazareth is here!"

Immediately the blind beggar is made equal to the occasion. He is sensitized to the fact that there, despite the confusion and tumult, is God. Now hear it loudly and clearly, my friend, when God made us, God gave us a set of antenna that was

made to be sensitive enough to bring in God, and He most certainly is there.

And the second attribute of a man who begins to rise to the full stature that God intends of a man is that man will make the most of the moment of God's nearness. And that's exactly what happened....

...having been told that Jesus of Nazareth is there, he cries out and begs for attention. Great day in the morning! Read it as it is! The record has it that Jesus stopped and paid him attention and says, "What can I do for you?"

...it happened! just like that! God stretches out a hand in a man's direction, and God's outstretched hand is never empty. When God made us, He made us that we were capable to choose, and even in God's outstretched hand there is a variety. Now hear me carefully: while all things on God's outstretched hand are good, they are not all of equal value. Even the Good - Better - Best belongs in the category of things to be taken from God's hand.

Some things taken from God's hands last longer and take us farther. And some are characterized by the pure indelible mark of the eternal dimension, as others are not. Man was never made to sit by the way-side, incapable of choosing. To the credit of the blind beggar, when Jesus Christ says, "What can I do for you?" - - he goes the limit, and takes the finest and the best that Jesus Christ could possibly offer.

Now, that you might better understand that, look at what might have been the beggar's options.....

...in his moment of choosing, he might have said, "Jesus, you can see for yourself that I'm a beggar, you can also see that I'm blind. I'm fed up with it. I'm never quite sure what my day's take is going to be, Jesus. I'll tell you what you can do for me, Jesus. You have a way with people --

- - the richest man in Jericho lives out at the edge of town.
Why don't you go see him, and in your own way as you influence people, get him to set up a trust fund in my behalf, so that I can be guaranteed an annual income - - "

...not bad! It surely would have improved his economic situation, and that would have been a better situation than what he had. But had the blind beggar chosen that, he still would have remained in his blindness!

...or he might have said to the carpenter's-son-turned-preacher, " I'll tell you what you can do, Jesus....I'm the blind beggar here, but there are other people who beg. You might not be made aware of it, but there is competition in this business, and happy indeed is the man who gets the best place where he can make his pitch. Sometimes I can't get here as soon as I would like, and others crowd me out. This is what you can do: in your own way go to six or seven people in this town and you charge them with the responsibility, one a day, to come to my house, bring me as quickly as possible and as safely as possible, to the best spot. . . "

...he might have asked for that, and the net result would have been that his situation would have been improved, but he still would have been blind.

To the everlasting credit of blind Bartimeus, he went the whole limit and took from God's outstretched hand the best that God could possibly give: his sight was restored. He no longer had to be a beggar, and he went leaping after Jesus Christ. From God's outstretched hand he took a better boon than alms.

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My friend, did it ever occur to you how easily satisfied we are by taking the lesser thing from God's outstretched hand? Oh, don't misunderstand me, anything that God gives is good, but there are people who ask from God just the gift of another day - - that's all they ask - -

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...and yet in God's outstretched hand there is not only the gift of just another day, but God offers the measure of forgiveness, as far as yesterday was concerned, so that you go into the new day, you don't have to be so easily beset by the burden of sin from yesterday.....

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...and God wants to give that as He gives any new day as well.

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And when God gives a brand new day, He's perfectly willing to offer a sense of direction, to show you how you ought to move in and through that day. But for any number of people that I know, that's one thing that they never take from God's hand. They'll take the day itself, but never the added gift of direction.

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For any day that is taken from God's hand could be mine, yet as I run my course in that day I could fail and I could falter. God who gives me the day also says to me, "I will go with you, I will never leave you - - I will not forsake you"that means, He can lift me up, He can turn me around and keep me on the right course...

...but how few of us take the greater blessing from God's outstretched hand.

No offense, Grandma, please, no offense - - - you may be for us as a symbol of peace and tranquillity and reflection - - you may be for us as the picture of one whose purposes remain and who is sustained by the fact of God who does

not change, as you sit and rock in your chair.

But the symbol for our day must be the man who is no longer content to sit back detached, immobilized, uninvolved - - but who is willing to get up once he's empowered by the God who can sustain, and then follow after. To the everlasting credit of the blind beggar Bartimaeus, he chose, he chose wisely, he chose well.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"In The Confused Tumult Of Life:
III FROM ME?" (Luke 18:41)

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Quiet our minds and hush our hearts, O God, as perchance this voice, no matter how feeble nor frail it may be, it can still be recognized as an echo of Your eternal voice. So let us look upon anyone who stands at the sacred desk. Amen.

I've a friend who tells me that the trouble with life is that it's such a daily thing. His implication, of course, being that it becomes exasperating in its monotony, its repetition, in its sameness. But my friend who says life is such a daily thing is only discussing a half-truth, for if by that he means it is monotonous in its sameness, life is also variety. And in its variety there can come stimulation, and there can come challenge. There is a different day, every now and then, that's quite unlike every other day, and just because this happens to be true, some of us are perfectly willing to go on living in the hope that the day that's going to be different will be a better day.

Do you realize what we have been doing these Sunday mornings during Lent? We have been talking about a blind man who sat by the way-side begging, who one day found out that a particular day in his life was gloriously different. It's that well-turned page, now, of the Good Book, the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. Let me remind you of the incident....

...Jesus is on His final journey to Jerusalem, and to get there He has to pass through a town called Jericho. His heading that way engenders a great deal of enthusiasm - - He's

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the most distinguished visitor that the town would ever receive. His reputation had preceded Him. In the hustle and bustle there is by the way-side, however, one who doesn't quite get involved, because of his physical limitation - - he's a blind man who is a beggar.

...and hearing the multitude going by he cries out, "What does it mean?".....as much as to say, "What's going on out there, in this tumult, this confusion, this unsettlement?"

....and the voice comes back, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing through." And the blind man cries out, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me!"

...and then, wonder of wonders, according to the record, Jesus Christ stops, and pays attention to him - - - He who is the personification of Love-on-Pilgrimage takes time out to pay heed to a blind beggar by the side of the road. And He says to him, "What can I do for you?"

.....that's the day that was different.

For the most part, up until this happened, that day in Jericho was pretty much like any other day - - shoving, shouting people.....

Rachel was behaving that day just as she had behaved the day before and the day before that, running down the street yelling after her irresponsible children, like wild colts they were, that she had never been able to tame....they were that kind of a breed in that day, too....

Yusuf...the merchant in the bazaar, the third stall on the right....

he was having a great to-do on that day just as he had the day before and the day before that, with a camel-driver who had arrived belatedly, which simply meant that the shipment which he had expected and which he had promised is prize customer was not being delivered....and Yusuf was the kind of man who became very unhappy when he lost a sale. This kind of thing was going on in the bazaar that day just as it had gone on the day, and the day before that....

Then there was the old man who went from acquaintance to acquaintance and even from stranger to stranger and described the boy for whom he was looking - - his prodigal son - - he had run away - - he had been gone three weeks now, and he hadn't any idea where he might be.....

Then of course the only sorrowful one that stands out so poignantly on that street in Jericho was the mother who had lost her only son, her only means of livelihood, and in her sorrow she could not be quiet. She was that way that day in Jericho, she was that way the day before and the day before that.

So the blind beggar Bartimaeus was caught up in it all that day just as he had been caught up any other day. And as for himself, if there was the noise, the tumult and the confusion, he was imprisoned in his darkness, and he might have said to himself lthat morning, "Is this the way it must be forever and ever?"

But that was the day that was different!

God allows us different days, some days gloriously different. That was the day when Jesus Christ came to Jericho.

And I suggest that in every man's soul there's a spot called Jericho,

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which constitutes a kind of cross-roads in his life where Jesus Christ eventually appears. And if you want another figure of speech, on the calendar of every man's soul there's a day marked Jericho: The Appearing of Jesus Christ. Will we be like the blind beggar Bartimeaus, equal to the occasion, and seize upon it and cry out, "Have mercy" and look upon Him as the answer, that in Him and through Him there might be hope by which we could be made free from our imprisonment?

Father Hennessey, the very able editor of a Roman Catholic publication called Sign, states in his most recent editorial that life for us is like a jungle, and none of us seems to find the way out. Is that a valid reading of contemporary man - - caught in a jungle, not knowing his way out?

Andrew Greeley, the distinguished sociologist of our day, has said that men has three choices, contemporary man, that is, and who among you cannot understand this, as you put your finger upon the spiritual pulsebeat of our day? Says Greeley, the sociologist, there are only three choices, and the choices are between Cynicism, Despair, and Hope. It's been said of a man who died that they were never able to establish a medical reason for his dying. And those who knew the man and his situation honestly believed that he'd completely given up, lost the will to live, and he had become a man without any hope. He could not see any way out of his imprisonment.

Blind beggar Bartimeaus ought to become the proto-type for us, with life pressing in upon him and imprisoning him in his darkness, he cries out "Jesus! - - do it for me!"...as much as to say,

"I honestly believe that you are able, you can.

You can give me light, you can guide me - - you

can take me from where I am to where I ought to be...."

This, I honestly say to you, is the meaning of the Christian Gospel -- the

direct encounter with Jesus Christ, by which a man calls Him by name and cries out for help.....and then discovers that God gives him undivided and personal attention.

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If you should be in Jacksonville, Florida, on a Tuesday evening, and you are anywhere near the vicinity of Florida Junior College, you discover the influx of students who are there for the night classes. Ann Adams is one of them. Very much like any of the other students, except, when she arrives for her psychology class which she takes on Tuesday night, she comes in a little red station wagon. The entire side doors of the station wagon open outward. When she goes to class session she is wheeled from the station wagon to the door of the classroom building. Then four sturdy men, sometimes strangers to her, lift her bodily and take her to the classroom.

You ought to know this about Ann Adams - - she is a polio victim. She was stricken just before Christmas, 1950. For a year-and-a-half she lived in an iron lung. There was some question as to whether or not she would ever recover. She had five years in that iron lung, an excruciating existence, and at her age, more dependent than the average child. And to this very day she doesn't breathe at all except with the assistance of an electrical mechanical device.

If I were preparing my Christmas shopping list right now, I know something that I'd like to put down on that list. I'd like to have a copy of one of her paintings, because that's the way she earns her livelihood now. It takes her four months to complete a painting.....you see, I neglected to tell you that she's completely immobilized except for her head. The only part of her body that she can move voluntarily is her head. She's learned how to become an artist. Somebody sticks the paint brush into her lips and between her teeth,

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and then with four months of deliberate effort she'll complete a painting. The one that you might prize, if you were getting your shopping list ready for a very special friend, is her painting entitled "Hope." It consists of a solitary figure, a man heading in the darkness of the night toward the light of a farm house in the distance, and on that winter's night he's being guided by the light that comes from a star.....and that star symbolizes the fact of God, who guides us from our darkness towards some semblance of security and shelter, and the meaning that comes to us through identification with loved ones.

It was not always that way for Ann Adams, even in her affliction. For five years she despaired of life, she was a cynic.....and you might quickly say, "and who wouldn't be!" But one day somebody came and told her about Jesus Christ. And as a result of that encounter with God's representative, she surrendered her life into the arms of Jesus Christ.

Well, my friend says that the trouble with life is that it's such a daily thing, exasperating by its monotony. But I say to him, you tell a half-truth, for life has variety. And in its variety there comes stimulation and challenge. For in God's plan for every man's life there can be a day that can be so decidedly different. It's all wrapped up in the encounter that could be yours with Jesus Christ saying to you - - "Now, what can I do for you?"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

In The Confused Tumult of Life:

IV - "FOR YOU?"

(Luke 18:41)

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Help us earnestly to believe, O God, that
it's still possible to discern an echo of
Your voice down through the corridors of
time, perhaps even now and in this place.
Through Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

I don't know how it may be with you. I speak only for myself. In my
book there is no commercial, there is no spot announcement, that can quite
compare with the effectiveness of the series being sponsored, produced,
directed by the American Cancer Society, in its very deliberate, bold,
gracious and necessary step to motivate people to give up cigarette smok-
ing. If you've seen any of these, you know how at a precise moment they
deliver the impact, putting before you one or two people who, having suc-
ceeded in kicking the habit, trying to impress upon our minds that it does
happen, it does occur, that it's possible.....and this is done so effective-
ly by that precise moment when the impact is made.

In much the same spirit, my friend, I want to call your attention all
over again to that passage of Scripture which serves as the basis for this
series of sermons these Sunday mornings during Lent. It happens to be the
Gospel lesson for the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. The passage is recorded
in the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It deals with the last
journey that Jesus made to Jerusalem. To get to Jerusalem He has to pass
through a town called Jericho.

He is, of course, the most distinguished visitor ever to come to that

town. A crowd quickly gathers, and the crowd is typical of all crowds....
...shouting, pushing, jostling. By the side of the road there's a man who
is not caught up with the crowd. He's a beggar man, who is blind. He
cries out -- don't you remember -- "What's going on there?" - - -

" - - hearing the multitude pass by."

...it's classically expressed in the Scriptures,

"he asked what it meant."

The reply comes back: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Then, in an
uninhibited and unrestrained way he cries out, "Jesus, thou son of David,
have mercy on me." They try to quiet him, but again and again, with complete
abandon, the same cry: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy --- help me!"

Now this is where the impact is made. If you were using either a
zoom lens or if you wanted to zero in on this, would you believe me -- it
actually happened: Jesus Christ stopped! -- looked at the blind beggar,
directed His words to him and said, "What do you want me to do for you?"
.....at that precise moment Jesus Christ gives a blind man His undivided
attention. It does happen, my friend, it did occur.

And this is always part of the Gospel message, that God who is the
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ pays people personal attention. Some of us
speak out of our own experience. We know this to be true. This is one of
the grand and glorious things that we can say about the Christian Gospel --
that God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is personally interested
in us.

Well, let me express it for you in this way. As you and I travel the

highway of life, eventually we encounter God who comes to us in the form of Jesus Christ. It does happen. And when it happens, His hand outstretched, He says to each of us: "What can I do for you?"

Now to better understand this, let me go back, re-iterate.

Jesus Christ is on His way to Jerusalem. He knows exactly, by this time, what's going to happen in Jerusalem -- He even has predicted it. He's going to be put to death. They're going to kill Him.

Now, in your understanding of Jesus Christ, remember that He is God-Come-To-Us-In-The-Flesh. God is love. Jesus Christ is Love Incarnate. And you can evaluate and assess the whole meaning of the life of Jesus Christ while here on earth in this way: Love on pilgrimage. Love making its journey through life. The final, the complete price of that love is to be paid in Jerusalem. He's on His way to do it.

Now as He goes through Jericho He might have said to Himself, from a purely human point of view, "I can't wait until I get through this town, I can't wait until I get to Jerusalem, I can't wait until I get to Calvary, so it's all over. God, you know I've done my stint for you -- God, you know I haven't failed You -- God, you know that I've labored my way through life loving people -- ".....and from a purely human point of view He might have reasoned to Himself....."and where is it going to get me? -- the net result, a broken, bleeding body on a blasted cross....."

....so He might have said to Himself, as He went to Jericho, "I don't have to pay attention to anybody here. I've done my share."

But that's not God's kind of love! God's kind of love is always meeting a need whenever and wherever it occurs. God's kind of love is always able to pay attention when the cry for need is made.

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When we were students in Gettysburg Seminary a number of years ago, the administration in its wisdom saw fit to bring in from the field some very able pastors -- if you want to use the expression, and a perfectly good one -- successful pastors, who had brought to their role in a congregation substance and meaning as a pastor. I recall now the day when Dr. Joseph B. Baker, the beloved pastor of Saint Matthew Church in York, Pennsylvania, made his visit to the Seminary....a good and able man.

When the time came for the questions to be put to him, one of the students said, realizing how much he was able to accomplish in a day, "Well, Dr. Baker, would you mind telling us what your schedule is?" And the grand soul simply chuckled and said, "Schedule? -- man, there isn't any such thing! You just do the next thing!

That's what love does. Love doesn't have a schedule, it just does the next thing, that needs to be done. There isn't a mother here this morning who doesn't understand that. She's busily engaged, let's say, preparing for the evening meal, making certain that it's ready when Dad comes home....

...then the interruption...the door opens....he comes in crying ...crocodile tears. He's fallen, he's skinned his elbow, he's bruised his knee - - - or he might come putting out his thumb, with a peasy splinter, or a thorn. Where is the mother who heartlessly says to her child, "Don't interrupt me now! I've got to finish what I'm doing." - - ?

...she stops what she's doing. Love always does the next thing that needs to be done.

All right, look at it this way: Jesus Christ who is Love Incarnate now,

confronts the man who cries out to Him. And when a man is encountered by the fact of God it's always his moment of truth. And he sees himself for exactly what he is.

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Bartimaeus cries out, and as he cries out for sight he makes the admission that he's a blind man. To the everlasting credit of Bartimaeus, when he's asked what it is that he wants God to do for him through Jesus Christ, he says, "Give me my sight! -- I want to see!" He admits that he is blind. He recognizes his most difficult of all situations.

This is the page from the book of the blind man that you and I can well afford to study very earnestly. Not all of us are willing to admit, not even to God, the worst situation that becomes us. If this should be a 20-minute sermon, by the time I would have finished, in all likelihood you would have blinked your eyes 350 to 400 times. The average blink of the human eye lasts about 3/10 of a second, and the blinks come 2 8/10 seconds apart. The average person is blacked out, because of blinking a total of 11% of the time. This partial blink-caused blindness often, I am told, accounts for the misreading of scientific instruments, the missing of tennis balls, the wrecking of automobiles. If it can be said that all of us to a degree are partially-sighted by this blink-blindness, let me also suggest that we are partially sighted, spiritually speaking. Every single one of us has limited or partial if not total blindness when it comes to understanding the fact of God. It is only as the scales from our spiritual eyes are removed that we can see God as He ought to be seen, and that only through Jesus Christ.

The Christian word is this: God is never seen perfectly, and completely,

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except as He is seen through Jesus Christ. We're all blind to a degree when it comes to the fact of other people. Some of us never really see other people. We are partially sighted when it comes to the needs of other people. It is only through Jesus Christ that we ever have what might be referred to as perfect vision, when it comes to regarding another individual. It is only by the grace of God, who takes the scales from our eyes, that we ever really see ourselves as we are, for we are blind to our capabilities, we are blind to the potential that God has put in every single one of us. We're also blind to our wickedness.

To the everlasting credit of blind beggar Bartimaeus, encountered by the fact of God, he saw himself as he actually was, and cried out for the thing that he needed most. And through an encounter with God he received his vision.

Beloved, blind beggar Bartimaeus is Every Man.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

March 15, 1970

"In The Confused Tumult of Life:
V: "WHAT WAS MADE OF IT?" or "SO WHAT?" (Luke 18:43)

You can speak to us, O God, in many ways and in many places. It's here now that we've come to quiet our minds and to hush our hearts that we might be still and hear in some way an echo of Your voice. Amen.

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Like most of you, I'm still finding my way around Silver Spring and its environs. So I carry around with me a road map, a street map, and I must admit that I find nothing quite as irritating in the course of the day's calling as to discover that when I come to a certain intersection, that some prankster has reversed the street signs.

Occasionally I go back to where we used to live at 9219 Manchester Road, and to this very day, would you believe me, but I am thinking as I pass that intersection at Hamilton Avenue and Worth, out of the corner of my eye I see the street sign, and I remember how it used to bother me ever so often, when someone giving way to an impish inclination would simply turn the signs around. In that little cul-de-sac of sorts on which we used to live -- six, seven, eight houses -- a friend of mine once told me how terribly serious this could be. For if, you see, a call had been made to the fire department, the driver of the fire engine and the truck would become bewildered and confused as to just what street he was on. You know how important those minutes can be.....or if one had sent out a call to the ambulance, to the rescue squad, in a very bewildered way the driver would be going up for five blocks, perhaps, the wrong street.....you know what difference that could mean. It's a serious thing, you see, to have street signs reversed -- or what is more, to take that

direction signaler on a one-way street and turn it completely around.

I submit to you this morning as I stand here, that what I've already said could be parabolic of our age. Students of society and men and women as they put their finger upon the pulsebeat of people's lives are inclined to think that we are as a people bewildered and confused, trying to find our sense of direction.

That blind man in Jericho, to whom we have been referring repeatedly these Sunday mornings during Lent, on the day when he met Jesus Christ received his sight, and for the first time in his life was able to move in a certain direction — accurately. It's because I've come to believe that ours is a generation that isn't quite certain as to its sense of direction that with all the fervor of my soul I have been asking you to think these Sunday mornings on that 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke....

...Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, and on His way to Jerusalem He passes through Jericho...and by the side of the road there is the blind man. You ought to be very familiar with the details of the incident by this time. The blind man, realizing he's imprisoned in his blindness, cries out for help....and there amidst the confusion and the tumult of life there is Someone who helps him and gives him sight.....and let it be said again, for the first time in his life he gets a sense of direction correctly.

People who are bewildered and confused today, and who lack a sense of direction, have little if any advantage over a man who is blind. I'm inclined to think that ours is a society which is becoming increasingly blind

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as to its sense of moral value. There is most certainly an erosion of conscience. Where did I read it? -- I've quite forgotten the columnist but I can quote him for you -- "the cold-blooded California murder of Sharon Tate and three friends raises the wider problem of an existential view of life that frees neighbor relations and sexual love from universally valid criteria and connects them only with one's inner preferences."

The Los Angeles Times a short while ago carried quite an article about Susan Atkins -- does the name mean anything to you? (I'm sorry if it does). Susan, you see, was one of those disciples-of-sorts of that very evil person, Charles Manson, who was the one who master-minded the terrible deed by which those people were so brutally slain. Well, Susan Atkins is speaking her piece. She is reflecting on that night. These are her words:

"When we got back -- he just acted as though it never happened. Charles is the type that lives for each second, and pays no mind to what may happen two seconds later. That's how much he is with it -- I went on in and slept for awhile, but first I think I made love with Clem -- I'm not sure who I made love with -- or if I even made love that night....there was a comment made by one of us that what had happened had served its purpose. That was to instill fear in Man himself. Man the Establishment. That's what it was done for. To instill fear -- to cause paranoia. To also show the black man how to go about taking over the white man. Then I just put what had happened out of mind, the best I could. But I couldn't -- I'd look at Charlie, and he'd wink at me and give me re-assurance that everything was OK -- was going to be all right. Not that he'd say it aloud. He didn't have to say it -- I just felt it. That's the way Charlie was."

I'd make this required reading for every teenager. What in essence do you have here? -- a diabolically possessed person who winks at the basic principles of morality and so possessed the minds of other people as to get

them to believe that it's perfectly all right. What you have here also is the turning-around of the directional signals, saying it doesn't make much difference what direction you go in, everything is going to be quite all right.

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That blind beggar, Bartimaeus, received his sight that day in Jericho and for the first time got his sense of direction correctly. I say to you this morning, that that's what Jesus Christ is all about. No matter how you understand it, He's here to show us the way in which we ought to go. There is no school of morality, there is no system of ethics that you can trust, completely and perfectly, if somewhere in it and through it you can't find the stamp, the divine imprimatur, of the mind and the spirit of Jesus Christ.

I wish I didn't take life as seriously as I do -- the only salvation that I have for being as serious as I am is that I call myself now a "brooding optimist" because from the books that I read these days, I know that I have to discipline myself not to reach for certain books again, and there are some books that I'm sorry I even read in the first place. Some of them from very able minds and very remarkable people, whose sense of direction just can't be trusted. I was absolutely chagrined the other day when I read the report in one of the periodicals that I read, that a very learned man was being asked what he thought of Jesus Christ. And he came up with this reply, would you believe me -- "I am not so sure. I don't know what I think of Jesus Christ."

Fortunately, that blind beggar in Jericho had heard people talk about Jesus Christ and when they talked about Jesus Christ they talked about Him

convincingly. You see, Jesus is passing through Jericho, and the blind beggar says, "What Does it mean?"and they said, "Jesus is passing through." And immediately he cries out for mercy and for help, honestly believing that this one is to be trusted and to be believed.

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The beggar would never have cried out if what he had heard about Jesus Christ wasn't commendable. I hope Dr. Houser, when he speaks to people in Bieber Hall on Monday and Tuesday in Holy Week, will lay it on the line -- the terrific responsibility that rests on any person who knows anything at all about Jesus Christ -- to speak of Him - convincingly, to give the very valid impression that He is to be trusted, that He is to be followed.

Now there's another thing that needs to be said. Once the blind man received his sight he got up and he followed Jesus Christ. When God gives us sight, He gives us sight that we might use it to follow Him. I'm not sure that all of us who are Christians are really following Jesus Christ. I'm brought up short by the fact that when I read this Gospel lesson, that when the blind beggar, having received his sight got up and followed Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ was on His way to Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem He was to be crucified, in Jerusalem He paid the supreme price -- Love's perfect work. We have reason to believe that the blind beggar followed Jesus all the way.

If I were a novelist I think I'd like to write a novel about the blind beggar Bartimaeus in Jerusalem....

...what happened to him after he received his sight
and was following Jesus Christ?

...did he ever regret the day that he found out where
Jesus Christ was going?

There are those who tell us that no one who has ever followed Jesus Christ perfectly and completely has ever regretted it. Some of us are willing to

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follow Jesus Christ to a degree. Some of us are even willing to follow Him to church! I don't know how many of us are willing to follow Him with the vision that He gives us all the way to Calvary, but I know one thing: if you don't follow Him all the way to Calvary, you'll never end up in the Resurrection Garden! And that's the route that He took.

Well, God looked down upon the children of men -- there's a figure of speech that can be used -- they were lost in the darkness. So God gave us Jesus Christ. Don't ever forget two things He said about Himself:

He said: I am the Light of the world

He also said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

For a world that's getting its directional signals all fouled up, how fortunate you are -- you have Someone who is pointing the way.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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O GOD, there is so much you have to offer, so much that you can give. Help us, O God, to ask for the right thing. Help us, O God, to know that we have a sense of direction in our life, that we have a purpose for which we are to live. O God, help us so to live that we shall not need to be ashamed when we have to render account to you. With whatever talents and abilities that we have, with whatever gifts we possess, help us to use them wisely and well.

O GOD, help us to use them to earn a living for ourselves and for those who are dependent on us, but help us never to use them selfishly but always for the good of the community of which we are a part. If we can help, grant that we may never refuse to do so. If we can render any service to any man, help us never to grudge to give it. Help us to use our money and our possessions wisely and well. Teach us to know the responsibility of having and the joy of giving. Help us always to remember that we hold everything that we have in trust for you, that we must use it as you would have us to use it.

O GOD, help us to use our time wisely and well. Help us not to waste time in idleness and help us also so to live that we shall have time to rest and time to relax, that we shall not always be rushed and over-busy. Help us not to be so busy with the petty things in life that the really important things get crowded out. Help us never to be so busy that we have no time for friends and for family and for loved ones, no time for our private prayers or the public worship of your Church.

Help us, O God, always to live rightly with others. Help us never to bear grudges and never to be unforgiving. Keep us from the suspicious mind that thinks the worst, and the spirit which sees slights and injuries which were never intended, from the temper that is too quick to blame and the tongue that speaks too soon, from being obstinate and not admitting error, and from pride which cannot apologize.

O GOD, help us to live rightly with ourselves, make us always honest with ourselves, keep us from being blind to our own faults and from deceiving and deluding ourselves into thinking that we're better than we are. Help us to see ourselves as we are so we may know our own weakness, and then seek the grace which is made perfect in it.

O GOD, help us to live rightly with you, help us to love you, to reverence you and to obey you this day and all our days, so that trusting in your love and forgiven by your grace we may come to the end without fear and without regret.

OUR FATHER.....

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Palm Sunday

March 22, 1970

Thy voice, O God, continues to be heard down through the corridors of time. Perhaps we'll be able to get an echo of it in this place, even now. Through Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jon is the artist in our family. Some time ago when I was in New York City I called him and suggested that we might be able to have dinner together, that if he wished he could bring along a friend, and furthermore, he could choose where we might eat. Being an art student, you can well imagine the locale that he chose. It was Greenwich Village.

And when my meeting was concluded I walked the length of 5th Avenue from where I was down to the Village. The nearer I got to the Village, the more fascinated I became, not only by the people that I saw there, but I was also fairly intrigued by the townhouses that were being restored. There are some people who are putting as much as a hundred thousand dollars and more into re-furbishing and restoring some of those structures.

It all came back to me several weeks ago, when, with you, I read in the newspaper about one of those townhouses being demolished -- I can give you the exact number, it was #18 on West 111th Street. There in the debris they discovered the remnants of human beings. There was that tiny finger -- that's all that remained of her as far as identification purposes were concerned. She was not yet thirty years of age. Her name, Diana Houghton (?) -- a very remarkable gal.

People who knew her said very interesting things about her. Her father, in interview, said she was the victim of 'intellectual hysteria.' Some folks said when they talked with her, by the time the hour had passed they were left completely dizzy.

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Diana was trying to find herself. In the process, unfortunately, she completely rejected the values, the absolutes, the standards which her parents had tried to instill in her. She thought she'd find her way for herself., with a kind of flagrant disregard for established norms. Her sister said, "Our father always said that sooner or later it would be proven whether Diana was right and we were wrong.....or whether we were right and Diana was wrong." As far as this world is concerned, Diana never found outa misguided life was blown to bits.

But it didn't have to be that way. For there is a norm and a pattern that can be followed.

Atomic energy is a rather fascinating thing. The possibilities of its use, you see, are varied. Back there at the very beginning, say in 1951, as late as that, the National Bureau of Standards developed an atomic clock, a clock, mark you, that has an accuracy of one part in ten billion, which is simply to say that in three million years it will neither gain nor lose more than one second. Now that's about as perfect a time-piece as you can get.

And because that happens to be true, we order our appointments accordingly. We don't seem to be in a chaotic state as far as accuracy of time is concerned, because we always have a norm to which we can refer.

Well, maybe there's something in you that says, well wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a norm in our behavior pattern for life, if as there is a

measurement for time, could there not be a measurement for behavior, so that in our ethics and in our morality, and even in our religion, we'd always have something by which to go.

Well, I'm happy to tell you that that's what Palm Sunday is all about. For as you recall the Gospel lesson that was read for you, there is the entrance of Jesus Christ, a solitary figure, into Jerusalem. He's standing out there in clear view of the whole world, and at least once a year some of us go back and remember that procession into the Holy City....some of us look upon Him with esteem and affection. We look and find in Him the personification of absolute Truth, absolute Love, absolute Compassion. In fact, we come out at the end and say, He's absolutely GOD!

...and in our deep reverential moments we put our fingers to our lips and in the spirit of awe we say, "very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father - - "
...and that One was here on this earth! - - and exemplified for us the perfect norm and the perfect pattern.

I'm still remembering some of the things I told you in last Sunday's sermon. I cherish the thought you, too, might remember. In that sermon it was established that the one characteristic that might be said of our age, that we are bewildered and confused. We're a people who seem to have lost our sense of direction, morally and ethically. Is there no norm nor pattern for us?

One hears rather sadly the cry of those who are under thirty when they say, well, who's to say what's right?....as much as to imply what may be

right for you doesn't necessarily have to be right for me, and I'll find out for myself! And so there is a kind of disregard for a set of absolutes.

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Some of us are over forty, some of us are over fifty. And not that we would pontificate -- we know we can't get away with that! -- but some of us do remember our under-thirty years, where there were those who taught us to live our lives by certain absolutes, to order the days of our years according to a moral framework of reference, rooted and grounded on spiritual truth. And I am numbered among those who can honestly say that whatever segment of sanity we have in this tricky age today, we have primarily because there were those who in our under-thirty years taught us the absolutes by which to chart our course.

...oh, we didn't always believe easily, we didn't always accept without some question, and the genius of man is that he was made to question....but he was also made to regard with profit the lessons of the past.

So I stand here now to remind you that on that Palm Sunday Jesus Christ stood out there in clear view of the whole world, personifying absolute Truth, absolute Love, absolute Compassion. He had a sense of direction, and He followed it into the market-place, into the carpenter's shop, on a dusty thoroughfare. He even followed it to a cruel place called Calvary... ..and never forsook the sense of the absolute even then!

This Palm Sunday some of us look at Him now, and on the horizon of time, and as He has His face set toward Jerusalem and progresses to the city, it could be that He puts in an occasional look back at us, daring us to follow after Him. Maybe you'll feel the pulsating quality of His challenge in the way the choir sings for you now as the offertory anthem, Martin Shaw's, "Thou Art The Way."

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(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Easter Day

March 29, 1970

The Lord is risen. I tell you the Lord is risen indeed!

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Without too much difficulty now, you ought to be able to picture it. Surely somewhere along the line you've met somebody quite like him. For our purpose now he's the proverbial Old-Man-of-the-Mountain....

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...his face, as weatherbeaten as the weatherbeaten shack behind him....seated there on a wooden bench, baggy trousers, bewhiskered...it could be that he's whittling.....

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There approaches him a young man. And the young man is goaded on by his companions who want to have put to the Old-Man-of-the-Mountain, presumably the wisest man in all those parts, the question-of-questions: What is the meaning of life? -- what is the lesson that life teaches?

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Once the question is put to the old man, without any hesitation he answers: "I will tell you the meaning of life," said he, "I will tell the lesson of life. I will tell it to you in three words: Life goes on." ...and so it does. That is the lesson of life.

But it's not distinctively a Christian philosophy. A Christian is not someone who simply says, "Life goes on." Rather, the Christian is one who says life goes on -- triumphantly. For the Christian life is not simply something to be endured. It is something to be lived out -- magnificently.

It is said that J. M. Barrie, the author, was once greeted by a man who came to him and said, "I've finished my book but I need a title for it. I just can't quite agree as to what it ought to be called. Won't you help me?" And he handed him the manuscript.

J. M. Barrie shook his head and he said, "I don't need to read your manuscript to give you a title - - I'll be able to give you a title and I most certainly will suggest one. But first let me ask you two questions: This book that you've written - - are there any drums in it?"

...the man who had written the book shook his head and said,

"No. No drums."

Barrie's second question: "Are there any trumpets in your book?"

The man shook his head and said,

"No. No trumpets."

"Well, there's the title for your book," said Barrie, "Without Drums or Trumpets."

And sad to relate, that's really the title of many a man's life. He lives out the days of his years constituting the story of his life - - it's a life that's very dull, a life that could be despondent as he suffers from despair, with no drums, and with no trumpets.

The life of the Christian could be a life without drums and trumpets, if it weren't for Easter. Easter spells out that life was meant to be lived triumphantly. How different today is from the last time that we gathered here, say Good Friday.

...the altar was stripped, perfectly bare, and the cross itself was shrouded in black...Mr. Clawson by deliberate design saw to it that there were no glorious

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strains from the organ....and the trumpets were not on hand on Good Friday. There was nothing resplendent -- no blithe spirit, such as the charming one who sang for us "Allelu, Allelu, the Lord is risen".....

...and that's the way it would have been if the Christian faith ended with Good Friday....

"Then placed they the body of Jesus in the tomb, and put the stone to the door and sealed it shut."

But God has up that divine sleeve of His always a tomorrow. And according to God's plan tomorrow was meant to be brighter and better, and all that's gone before is a kind of prelude. God intends that life should not end in defeat, and despair, and disillusionment.

Charles Dickens has a novel in which he has a very interesting character called Miss Havesham. She was swept off her feet by a scoundrel who proposed marriage. She consented. The date was set. She bought her wedding gown. The day arrived....the marriage feast was prepared, the table was spread....

...but there happened to be a streak of decency in that scoundrel. He knew he was going to opt out, but at twenty minutes to nine on the wedding day he sent word to Miss Havesham that as far as he was concerned, it was all off, and he wouldn't be showing up.

Suffering from despair, completely discouraged and disillusioned, Miss Havesham said, "The clock will have to stop. Do not let it go beyond the figure when the word came." And for Miss Havesham all of life stopped on that day at twenty minutes to nine in the morning.....not a single morsel of food was taken from the wedding feast table and she never so much as ever

desired to take her wedding gown off of her -- she kept it on her until the day she died, according to the novelist. When you suffer from despair, when you're defeated, when you're disillusioned, life stops. There's no interest in tomorrow.

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You know I delight in going up to see the Director of Youth Ministry in his office, for a number of different reasons. It's colorful and gay. It has some posters on the wall. There's one (I haven't told him) that I really think doesn't belong in an office of a Director of Youth Ministry. But I presume he has it hanging there because of the wit of it, and it's quite sharp. And these are the words that appear on that poster:

DUE TO LACK OF INTEREST, TOMORROW IS CANCELED

If youth really should have anything, they should have a tomorrow. But this is what the wit is saying to us, as he presumes to read the mind of today.: can there be a tomorrow? And if there is a tomorrow, won't it be more of the miserable same? -- sadness -- sin -- frustration -- defeat? It's a miserable thing that youth should ever think that. But there are those who tell me they do.

A Christian is meant to be one who would have a spring in his step, who shouldn't be afraid of tomorrow, but rather who would face it eagerly and enthusiastically. The Apostle Paul was quite a mission developer. He was also a good administrator and a good pastor.

...now do you know what a good pastor is? A good pastor is someone who takes to his heart the burdens of his people. He can't help but put his finger upon the pulse-beat of their souls. If they're becoming alienated from one another, if they're becoming alienating from themselves, if they're becoming

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alienated from God, he knows this. And he carries this burden constantly. A good pastor just doesn't take a detached attitude toward his people...and there's many a night when he might be disturbed in his sleep when he thinks of some of his parishioners who have become lack-luster and the glow of life has gone out of their hearts. I know whereof I speak.

The Apostle Paul was a good pastor. And he thought of a group of Christians who lived in a town called Ephesus. And the more he thought about them the more he became aware of the fact that they were dragging their feet, the light was going out of their eyes, there was no longer a spring in their step. They were becoming, so it seemed, a defeatist people.

You know exactly what he did. As he was wont to do so often, he sat himself down and he wrote them a letter. He didn't even get his first chapter finished until he had laid it on the line in a very classic way. Let me read for you the perfect expression -- it's the 19th verse of the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians:

"And how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God. That power is the same divine energy which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead."

...let me be reckless now and give you a free translation. The Apostle Paul is saying to them: "What ails you people! You don't have to be this way! You were meant to come alive. Do you remember that's what happened to Jesus Christ! -- the divine energy laid hold upon Him. He was the Resurrected One who came back and lived triumphantly!" "Now let me tell you something, says the preacher Paul, "God didn't run out of that kind of energy when Jesus Christ was here on earth. He wasn't the only one to whom He gave that

kind of thing. I want you to know this: that the same divine energy that motivated Jesus Christ to go beyond defeat to triumph is available to you and to me!"

....and this is the meaning of Easter -- so much so that it could be said, "As He lives, so may we --"not just somehow, but triumphantly.

Dr. David H. C. Read is a preacher that some of us read as with a great deal of interest. He once told a story of a budding young author who felt he had just done the masterful work. His cup of fortune overflowed when a wise old author heard about him and invited him to come to his study, and he said, "and bring your manuscript along." The young author was the kind of a chap who felt he wanted to tell it just as it is -- realistically -- no sentimentality for him -- he'd slice life brutally. The plot that he had was not at all unusual....

...it was the story of a young man who lived in a Pennsylvania town who got sick and tired of home, and one day he told his mother that he couldn't live there any longer, he couldn't leave fast enough, and he was going to head for the big city, New York. As he went out the door, his mother said, "Will you please wait long enough for me to tell you something. When you get into trouble, no matter how bad it is, you head for home -- -- and no matter how far away you have been, when you get to that hill that overlooks the valley -- right there it is -- you stop there, and look down into the village and you'll find this cottage, which is home. I'll be waiting, and will have a light burning in the window."

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....well the author who wanted to tell life just as it is has the boy in New York -- you can imagine how he details all the sordid unpleasant aspects of life in a metropolitan area. How the author enjoyed delineating those sins, telling life as it is. The chap ends up with a prison sentence, and like the proverbial prodigal of old he 'came to himself' and decides to head for home. ...trudging along the way, and he comes to the brow of the hill, he looks down into the valley, he sees the cottage. "But," the young author says, "There's no light burning in the window - - "

It's at this point where the old man, who had remained silent, jumps to his feet, infuriated - - says to the young author, "You devil, you, you put that light back in the window!"

This, I submit to you, is also a realistic reading of life. For once upon a time there was a Jesus Christ, who came and lived and suffered and died -- magnificently -- heroically -- triumphantly. And anyone who has ever believed in Him has been able to pass through the valley of despair and despondency. The message of Easter is that the eternal flame of God's love and truth shines, and it doesn't go out. Some of us believe that. If we couldn't believe it, we wouldn't want to live another day.....and we would most certainly be afraid to die.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 5, 1970

"THAT MAN THOMAS"

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Make it easy for us to believe, O God,
that even now and in this place your
voice can still be heard, no matter
how feeble nor frail the echo may be.
Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord.
Amen.

I can't possibly remember when I didn't believe in God. As far back as my memory will take me, I think I can unashamedly tell you, God has always been very real for me.

But that doesn't mean, however, that I have always understood God, nor does it mean that I've always understood the ways of God. On more than one occasion I have had my difficult moments with God. That's one reason why I come so easily to appreciate the Gospel lesson for this First Sunday after Easter. It deals with a man by the name of Thomas, who could not believe easily. He had his difficulties with his faith. Now it could be that you belong in the Thomas tradition. If that should be so, maybe this sermon will help you.

Now let me tell you that once upon a time Henry Drummond wrote a book -- I can't give you the title of the book. I've quite forgotten it. But I do remember very well something that he tried to establish in that book. He tried to detail the very fanciful notion, as he wrote back there in the 19th century, that Jesus Christ was making a return engagement to Palestine. Nineteen centuries had come and gone, and now in God's plan, Jesus Christ was to re-appear, in this fanciful notion that he develops back there in the 19th century.

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The idea caught on, the word spread like wildfire. People showed a great deal of enthusiasm and interest for it. He even suggests how travel agents had a field day...they provided all kinds of tours, guaranteed all kinds of accommodations. And as Drummond goes on to deal with that fanciful notion, he even envisions people selling all that they have, sacrificing their life earnings, in order to make the trip to Palestine, so that they might be able to come back and say:

"I looked into His face -- I stood right next
to Him -- I heard Him say it -- I felt the touch
of His hand - - - "

Henry Drummond, back there in the 19th century, could do something with that fanciful notion, and he honestly believed that there would be a great many takers for such a trip, because people were that interested.

Quite honestly now, I wonder what might be the reaction today if such an announcement were made.....would there be people who would pay it any heed at all? Suppose I came to you this morning, and I said, "I've had inside information -- Jesus Christ is going to re-appear in Palestine. The Church Council has very graciously allowed me a leave of absence to take any of you who might be interested to go over. I'm grateful that I can personally conduct the tour. I have been telling you a great deal about this Jesus Christ. Now hand-in-hand we'll go to meet Him personally. Anybody to sign up?"

...honestly now, do you think that people in this day and age would be that much interested? What do you suppose is the mood of contemporary man, as far as this whole business of believing in God is concerned?

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Back about four years ago an Englishman wrote a book. He entitled it, "The Advocacy of The Gospel." He begins with an interview that he had with a man who had been preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ for 65 years. And he puts this question to the veteran of the Church: "Tell us, will you, what was the frame of mind of man when you began your ministry 65 years ago -- what was the climate of thought?"

And the veteran of the pulpit said, "When I began my ministry 65 years ago there was a general sense of guilt on the part of people. No matter where you might go, when Christians gathered together the preacher began at that point, knowing that he was addressing a group of people who were aware of the fact that they were sinners -- and the one thing that they wanted above all else was to be given the note that God loves them, and that they were being forgiven."

The interviewer said, "And what's the frame of mind of contemporary man? -- these six and one-half decades have passed now."

And again the veteran of the pulpit said, "As I see it today, the mood has changed considerably. Now the mind of man seems to be a doubt, wondering whether there is anything to this whole God business. Thanks to the impact of the scientific approach, men, if they think at all about God, doubt."

That was four years ago. Things change rapidly. Do you suppose one could characterize the mind of contemporary man in that way today?

Less than four years ago, before his death, Dr. Franklin Clerk Fry, the President of the Lutheran Church in America, was asked by somebody at a church convention whether he thought the church in America would be persecuted, much as Christians were persecuted in Asia and in Europe. He replied immediately, "Persecuted? No. Ignored -- yes." And by that he simply im-

plied that we've come upon a day when people on the outside don't take the church seriously, because they have all too much evidence that people on the inside don't quite take God seriously.

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I frankly confess to you that I do take God seriously. I'm inclined to think that you take God seriously or you wouldn't be here today, or you wouldn't have been here last Sunday or you wouldn't plan to be here next Sunday -- and your intent to keep yourself within the fellowship of believers. But honestly now, those of us who do take Him seriously, this is not simply to say that we always can believe in Him easily. We have our difficult moments. Thomas speaks to us.

Let me remind you about him. He was one of the twelve disciples. He was by temperament a pessimist. After the crucifixion of Jesus he separated himself from the rest of the disciples and whenever they would huddle together, Thomas would be missing. But one day he did show up. And when he showed up he got a chorus of voices saying to him that they had seen the Lord -- they gave him to understand that they honestly believed it, and that they had no problem at that point.

Now the posture of Thomas is this, as much as to say, well that may be alright for you, but for me, unless I can see -- unless I can touch, I'm not going to.

Thomas was quite a chap. Oh, the story ends magnificently, but in the meantime he's alienated from the company of believers. They experience something that he doesn't know. Now listen to me carefully. As I read this Gospel lesson for the day I think I find out why he was the way he was.... why he went on doubting, and in his doubting he kept himself from the company of those who believed.

In the first place, he imposed upon himself a condition that made it difficult to believe. And would you believe me now if I were to tell you that this is the very thing that some of us do. When we can't believe easily, it may well be because we're self-imposing upon ourselves conditions that make it rather difficult for us to believe.

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I'm privileged to be your pastor. And I regard that sacred trust highly. But every now and then some of you amaze me - - - in your unguarded moments perhaps you indicate just how much you really don't believe about God, and His goodness, and His wisdom, and His love. And as I bear with you patiently I discover that one reason may be because you're imposing upon yourself conditions that make it difficult for you to believe. Now this is why I think Thomas can speak to us. Look what he was doing. He began by saying, "Unless - - " ...such-and-such a thing happens....

"Unless - - "such-and-such a thing takes place....

" - - I'm not going to believe."

I think I can tell you that God has taught me some things. One thing I can unashamedly tell you that I believe God has taught me is this: that you don't come into His presence laying down conditions....you don't go into God's presence telling Him how He ought to act. It's the vanity of man that presumes to call the divine shots, and you just don't do that with God. But that's what Thomas was doing. He kept saying, "Unless - - " ... "Unless - - " ... "Unless - - "laying down the conditions.

Let me give you the echo of some of your own voices....

"I've prayed to God that he might cure my wife of cancer- - "

...and then sometimes you imply that if He doesn't, you're not so sure that you're going to go on believing. This is what we indicate when we say, "I prayed - - but - - "....and

the implication is that you're not so sure that you're going to go on and pray the next time, because the results just didn't come out according to your measure the first time....

" Unless God gets that irascible -daughter of mine to mend her ways, I don't know that I can go on believing in the goodness of God."

...I recall how real this was to me when I went off as a neophite, going to the theological seminary for the first year, and there was the woman who sat in the president's office -- a limited faculty at that time, a limited staff. And she took some of us off of our feet almost when she said, "Well, here comes another crop of students -- "(this was the tenor of her conversation) " -- well, I hope you fellows can get an answer for me -- "

...that was back there in '37, '38, '39.....

"If God's such a good God, and if God's in control of things, why does He let a Hitler loose? If God is a God of love, why do people hate?"

...and then they throw that stickler at us, you see, that the worst conflagrations the world seemingly has known have come from so-called Christian nations!....."Unless God -- one, two, three -- I'm not going to believe." And all the time we deny ourselves the proper understanding of the nature of God, and the kind of God He is and the kind of people with whom this kind of God has to deal....

...all the while Thomas was imposing upon himself limitations to his faith, because he was saying he wasn't going to believe unless such-and-such a thing happened.

Then he was always imposing upon himself a condition to his faith by allowing himself to think that you can measure, in a tangible way, the basic realities

of life. Can you package up for me a pound of love, so that you can touch it, so that you can handle it? Are you going to tell me that the basic truth of God is so much ink -- printer's lettering -- on a particular page? Thomas was imposing upon himself limitations by saying, "Unless I can touch, unless I can handle."

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The third limitation he imposed upon himself was boxing himself in, painting himself in a corner by saying, "Unless - - "...and in doing that he allowed himself to become inflexible. I'm not so sure that God can do anything with a man who makes up his mind that he's not going to budge. I'm almost inclined to whisper this to you personally, even though I say it to you collectively -- this is the difficulty that some of you people get yourselves in in your inter-personal relationships -- how easily some of them could be solved if you'd just make up your mind that you'd budge a little. But when you come to a tight situation and you make up your mind that you're not going to give in one bit, even God can't do much with a man who goes on saying, "Unless - - " "Unless - - " "Unless - - "...and makes his situation increasingly inflexible.

Well, if you're having difficulty with your faith, take a lesson from Thomas. Oh, it turned out magnificently -- I told you it did -- and all because in the end Thomas found out he didn't have to have these proofs. It was absolutely possible for him to say with a spontaneous burst: "My Lord and my God!"

...but think of what happened in the meantime. All the while until that took place, he denied himself so much, because he kept imposing upon himself those terrible conditions that served as stumbling blocks. Don't let it happen to you!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

April 19, 1970

"WILDERNESS WAY"
Exodus 13:17-18)

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There are so many voices coming at us, O God, saying so many things. It is so easy to become bewildered and confused. But grant that in this time and in this place the voice that we now hear, no matter how frail or feeble it may be, it could be recognized as some echo of the eternal voice, bearing the accent of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now first the text: the 17th and 18th verses of the 13th chapter of the second book in the Bible, the book of Exodus:

"And God led them, not through the land of the way of the Philistines, although that was near; but God led them round about by the way of the wilderness."

If my memory serves me correctly, one of the great steamship lines of the world, in its attempt to stem the decline in passengers, came up with a very unusual advertisement, keeping in mind, of course, the contrast of travel by sea as against by air - - - their slogan was:

"Getting-there is Half the Fun."

No matter how good, and clever the ad, as far as increased passenger traffic was concerned it never quite paid off. The reason is obvious -- we are a people in a hurry. We are a people who are suffering from 'instant-this' and 'instant-that'....and once we make up our mind that we want to get some place, we want to travel the shortest possible route and get there in the soonest possible time. We're bent on instant arrival.

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The meetings of the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America were finished a little sooner than some of us had expected. So instead of spending Friday night in New York, for which I had made the reservation at the hotel, Winifred and I decided we'd wend our way back to Silver Spring. At 8:30 we had the Lincoln Tunnel behind us. Four hours later, with 240 miles behind us, we drove into the driveway two doors away from this place...no speed limit had been exceeded. We had simply traveled the most direct route.

Now this also has to be said. By the time we arrived in Silver Spring we were very much the same people that we were in Manhattan -- same attitudes, same convictions, same outlook on life. Enroute nothing had happened to us... ..we made no new friends...we didn't do a single thing to help anybody along the way -- and we didn't do anybody any harm, either. But we simply arrived pretty much the same as when we had left. We, too, suffer from the fact: business completed -- let's get on with it! -- let's get home as soon as we can! Instant arrival.

Clever as the Cunard Line's advertisement may have been:

"Getting-there is Half the Fun"

...some of us did pick up John Steinbeck's fascinating novel, out of true life: "Travels With Charlie." We read it, found it a delightful experience. But who among us is going to travel as John Steinbeck did, at a leisurely pace, taking a circuitous route, not hung up at all by any kind of a time schedule, but learning as much as he could as he traveled as slowly as he could. This is something, we say, only for those who write books, not for us.

At the turn of the century, when the paternal grandfather of your Assistant Pastor at a very tender age decided to come to the New World, he got on that

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steamer in the harbor of Beirut, by the shores of the Mediterranean, leaving all that was precious behind him -- never again to see those who were near and dear. He only knew one thing: he wanted to get on with it, to a brand new world. Three weeks had to elapse from the time he got aboard the steamer until he came to Ellis Island, and Lady Liberty. But how important those three weeks were! -- a necessary time in that chapter in his life, when he would learn so many important lessons that he would have to master before he would set foot on American soil. Heading for a strange land, a strange culture, a strange people -- in those three weeks in that steerage experience, he learned how to get along with people, how to get along with strange people.....and above all else, knowing him as I did, and as I still remember him, something of the impatient spirit was brought under control. There was no place to go, except to stay on the boat, and no matter how eager he was to get to America, he simply had to wait until he got there. And in the meantime, what lessons he learned, that held him in good stead as he made the adjustment to a strange new world.

Whenever I go to Bethesda, if I can possibly do it, I slow down in my driving when I pass the statue of the Pioneer Woman. She has much to say to us. Posed there dramatically for us, rough and rugged, even though it's cast in stone you can read something of the lines of discipline upon her face. But I presume even though she's facing as she is, this is the pioneer woman at the end of her journey and not especially at the beginning, because if you look at her closely enough, you might be able to see the pioneers learned so much enroute as they headed to where they wanted to go from where they had been....they had to always travel, not the direct route, they had to

C skirt the mountains, they had to go through the valleys, they had to follow the rivers, in that circuitous manner. And all the time something was happening to them, their lives were being disciplined, they were forced to endure certain things along the way, so that by the time they arrived, they were not the same people as they were when they departed. This is a fundamental fact of life: that he who would travel toward the Promised Land can well afford to go round about by the way of the wilderness.

O As a Sunday School scholar I used to be fascinated by this story -- how God kept promising those Children of Israel in their days of bondage that one day they would be released, one day they'd get the 'Go' signal, and then, being an impatient sort of person, I couldn't possibly figure how why God didn't allow them to go directly. The Promised Land was just a short distance across the border, but He made them wander for forty years -- forty years to get from where they were to some place for which they had longed for over two centuries!

P When you deal with God you deal with truth. When you deal with God you deal with the facts of life. Now as I look upon this fundamental lesson as I gleaned it from the pages of the Old Testament, I discover that if God would have allowed the Children of Israel to go directly into the land of the Philistines, they might have been wiped off the face of the earth. For I think I am correct in telling you that of all the enemies that the Children of Israel had to face, none were as formidable as the Philistines. The truth of the matter is they were not ready at that time to face the Philistines. They might have to face them ultimately, but not at that time. So God sends them round about, by way of the wilderness.

Y I suggest to you that every one of us has his own Promised Land. What an interesting exercise we would have right now if we could turn this into an old-

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fashioned meeting, where each person would stand up and in his own way try to tell the rest of us what he had in mind as a brighter and a better tomorrow toward which he is either being beckoned or driven. And I wouldn't give much for any man whose life didn't have a Promised Land. We live by the things for which we hope...we live by the things for which we reach. Every man has his own Promised Land. But a fundamental lesson that we need to master is this: that to get there, again and again and again we may have to go round about, by way of the wilderness.

If I hear the sociologists correctly, and those who deal with population figures, that within a year or two half the population of the United States will be under 25 years of age. We have been talking this way for some time, but now they say this will actually occur. Now when this does occur, as we've already had portent, there's going to be a great deal of shoving and shouting and pushing. This is typical of youth -- its restlessness, and wanting to get on. I look back over the days of my youth. Whatever impatience I have to this very day I can trace back to those days. May I tell you that I was numbered among those who had a sense of vocation early in life. This doesn't happen to every one who decides to study for the Ministry. But by the time I was in the 11th grade in school it was pretty clearly cut for me that I was meant to be a pastor...

...the most difficult stretch in my life that I've ever had to go through was the seven-year period through college and theological seminary. I just couldn't wait until I got out! -- I just couldn't wait until I could have a congregation all of my own! -- that I wanted to guide and direct in the way of the Kingdom -- to love into the Kingdom, and to suffer with people. But it takes time to learn how to love....it takes time to learn how to patiently suffer with people for whom you have responsibility. Those were the restless years.

And all the time God was saying, "Don't hurry! Don't hurry! -- learn the lessons now that only this chapter in your life can teach you."

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The older I become the more convinced I am that age ought to keep its contact with youth. Age needs to learn from youth -- fresh insights, and eagerness to get on with the thing, to get something done tomorrow morning by 10:30! But youth can learn something from age. And this is where some of us who are a little bit older dare not step aside. For the lessons that we have learned round-about by way of the wilderness need to be passed on. For the other side of the coin, even though there are some things that we would like to have done by 10:30 tomorrow morning, life just doesn't work that quickly, and there are some things that have to be learned in the interim before the thing is effective.

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I hope and pray that I don't 'turn the young generation off' when I say this, that every generation that is young, and I speak for my generation of youth, we suffer from a twin affliction, a double disease: "gimme-itis" and "now-itis." We want what we want, and we want it now. Because they don't think this through clearly, you get all the defilement of personality through pre-marital sex.....you get all the deterioration of personhood by addiction to drugs, taking the short-cut of alcoholism. I can understand why a person becomes an alcoholic, I can understand why a person becomes addicted to drugs -- -- who doesn't want his measure of euphoria? This world in which we live has its characteristics of wickedness, and while it may not be the best world, it's the only world we have right now! And we've got to learn to live our way through it and learn certain lessons in the meantime.

So God said to the Children of Israel: "Oh, no, you don't! The short-

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cut is attractive. But you take it at great peril." I've come up with a brand new appraisal for adolescence. I call adolescence, now, the "wilderness stretch of life." It's the round-about route that has to be taken. For even God doesn't take a person at twelve years of age and then instantly plunge them into young adulthood and for all that lies beyond adulthood. There is the necessary preparation, the lessons that have to be learned, in the round-about, by the way of the wilderness route.

I don't know what may be your station in life, where you are in your journey. Don't ever give up on that blessed hope of the Promised Land -- God's always keeping it there in front of you. But when you become frustrated in the meantime, would you believe me if I were to tell you this: that if it's the wilderness route that God says you have to take, then trust Him. For whatever route God says you ought to take to get where you want to be, in His name, as long as you can discern His presence along the way, no matter how circuitous the route, you're on the right road.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Easter Three - April 19, 1970

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O LORD, OUR GOD, Who hast bidden the light to shine out of darkness; Who hast again brought us to Thy House of Prayer, to praise Thy goodness and to ask for Thy grace: Accept now in Thy endless mercy what we offer to You through our worship and thanksgiving. We would ask that all that we ask of You may be the things that are best for us. Make us to be children of the light and of the day, and to remember how great the benefit is that comes to us because we are Your children.

REMEMBER, O LORD, according to the multitude of Thy mercies, Thy whole Church, and all who join with us in prayer, all our brethren by land, sea or air, wherever they may be in Thy vast Kingdom, who stand in need of Thy grace and of Thy favor.

AND ON THIS day we especially give Thee thanks, O God, that as man journeys from one chapter to another, as one journey is made from earth to space and outer space, that there are lessons yet to be learned in and through the journey itself. We give Thee thanks especially now for those brave and valiant ones who, knit by a common bond throughout the world, knew what it was to become as dependent creatures upon a Mind and a Spirit greater than their own. For this, the lesson of lessons that we might have been taught over and over again, in man's journey to the moon and his safe return, we give Thee thanks.

OUR FATHER.....

"THAT MY SOUL MIGHT SEE"
(Isaiah 45:3)

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Of all the places to which we could have gone, of all the places in which we might have been found, we're here, Heavenly Father. We honestly believe that there are some places where it is made easier to hear Your voice. Let that be true for us right now. Amen.

It was a critical period in the history of the Children of Israel. God has been watching over them now for some time. He had made all kinds of promises to them, and He always kept every promise that He made. But the trouble is that life was so hard for these people at times that they just couldn't quite remember that God always kept His promise. Now they found themselves in that very, very difficult period in their history.

Their troubled course had landed them in captivity - - oppressed strangers in a foreign land. They were being persecuted, they were enslaved. All along the line they had been led to think that they were the chosen ones, that they had a place all of their own in God's heart. Now it was so different. So far removed were they from their land, their culture, their temple. No matter how much they were reminded that they were God's and God was theirs, they still couldn't find it easy "to sing the Lord's song in a strange land."

Then God, as He's always wont to do, raised up one man in particular, and he had something to tell the people that he got first-hand. You know, God does that sometimes. Out of all the people on the face of the earth He'll put His finger on this person and that person in a way that He doesn't put it on other people, and God will give them a distinct revelation. It's like as

though they're getting inside information. And God did that for a man whose name was Isaiah. Now Isaiah maintained that God had not forgotten them. What is more, he insisted that no matter what the historical turn of events would be, God would somehow be at work in and through the changing picture.

Isaiah came to the Children of Israel and he said, "I have something to tell you -- ".....and I suppose if he were the kind of a man that I could picture him to be, he might say, "but you'll probably have trouble believing it, but why don't you listen to me just the same. This is what I want to tell you -- God is getting ready to get us out of this captivity. He's making all the arrangements, and He's going to use one man -- "

...it's at this point that we must understand the text for this sermon. The proclaimer Isaiah is setting forth an arrangement which God is making with a non-Jewish emperor. God's getting the Persian Cyrus to wage war against Babylon so that the captured Jews could be liberated in order to return to Jerusalem.....

" . . . now this man isn't a Jew -- he isn't one of our kind. But God's going to use him just the same. He happens to be a Persian king, and is a great man to win a war. So God's telling Cyrus, 'You go on in, take all your forces and your armies and go into Babylon, and when you conquer the Babylonians --' " Isaiah is now saying in something of this fashion, "Cyrus, you tell all those Jewish people -- and there aren't many of them left, but you tell them now that you've conquered Babylon that they can go back home....nobody is going to hurt them any longer."

What a thrill this must have been for them, to realize that the hope-of-hopes could one day be theirs, so splendidly expressed sometimes, by going

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back to Jerusalem. And only as a Near Easterner could do it, falling right down on his hands and his knees and with his own lips kissing the soil of one's native land. It's rather hard for you to appreciate that, because none of us, perhaps, has ever been taken into captivity. Some of us are so inclined to believe that we need to live by a healthy regard for one's native land. Well this was the hope that Isaiah gave to the people.

And then Isaiah said, "I'll also tell you something else that God told me. I've heard the conversation that He's having with Cyrus, and it looks as though God had to make a bargain with this Persian king in order to get the Persian king to be assured that everything is going to be all right.

Presumably Cyrus needs a bit of encouragement and assurance. So in that forty-fifth chapter, Isaiah tells how God went about to get Cyrus squared off. God takes care of those whom He sees fit to use, and goes to work in their behalf right down the line! God said to the Persian king, "I'll do something for you, since you're going to do something for me. I'm going to go ahead of you, right down the line, and in my own way I'm going to take care of the opposition. If you come some day to what looks like imponderable bronze doors, I'm going to see that they collapse in front of you." So this is the way God was talking and Isaiah heard it, and Isaiah passed it on to the Children of Israel. Now there's a fundamental truth of God that we'd do well to remember. Listen to the way Isaiah so classically expressed it:

"Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
Whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue
nations before him and ungird the loins of
kings, to open doors before him that gates
may not be closed:
I will go before you and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
And cut asunder the bars of iron,
I will give you the treasures of darkness
And the hoards in secret places,

That you may know that it is I, the Lord,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
For the sake of my servant Jacob,
And Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I surname you, though you do not know me" (Isaiah 45:1-4)

Well that's the shape of it! A startling reading of history, I dare say.
But that's the Biblical perspective for you.

There's something there that fascinates me. I don't know whether it will mean much to you or not. Isaiah said, "I heard God say to Cyrus, 'And I will give you the treasures of darkness.'"

...the treasures of darkness?

...but I'll tell you exactly what He meant by it.

God was telling Cyrus that when he got into Babylon, down deep underneath the earth there would be valuable ore, like precious gold. God's saying, "You can have it -- it's going to be yours. But it's down deep underneath the earth -- you can't see it." Now it's this figure of speech "the treasures of darkness" that fascinates me.

Most of us are afraid of what's in the dark. Haven't we been told repeatedly that there's need, even in the city of Washington, to have the city illuminated, everywhere, so that people can walk the street at night in safety and not be afraid of the peril that lurks in the darkness? Who isn't afraid of the darkness? Who doesn't shy away from it? If I'd have had time, I think I'd like to have done a little research on it, and see how much America spends every year to buy night lights, that we put in the crib room, that we put in the child's nursery, that we put in the receptacle out in the hall, so that when a child gets awake at night he won't be frightened by the darkness. There is something about the darkness that makes us afraid. God was telling Isaiah

that He had told Cyrus that he shouldn't be afraid of what he couldn't see, because underneath it there was something very precious.

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In all my years I've only known one person who deliberately went out of his way to teach people not to be afraid of the dark. Pete Renninger was his name, in my former parish. Pete was a very interesting person. He once told me whenever there would be a thunder storm, and the lightning would flash and the world became angrily dark, and his two daughters were quite young....he'd go into the bedroom where they had huddled themselves under the covers, and with pure paternal strength and affection he'd gather them up in his arms, one on either side, and he'd take them and he'd kneel alongside the window ledgeand he'd say, "Now look! Don't be afraid of it! Don't be afraid of the thunder, don't be afraid of the flashing light, don't be afraid of the angry darkness!" But most of us are.

Isaiah was saying that God was telling Cyrus that in the new land that he was going to conquer, in the darkness something precious could be found. Dare you believe that? Would you be willing to believe that in the darkness there are certain valuable things to be experienced?

I don't know how it may be for you, but for me the two most precious periods of the day: the dawn, and the dusk. Whenever I can, reasonably so, I welcome the opportunity of seeing God give us a brand new day, with the freshness of the dawn.....and then -- I don't do it too often because it just doesn't work out that way, but occasionally when I can I seize the opportunity to sit down quietly, when the day is ended, and just to see how gradually God envelopes the world with the darkness. Evening sets in -- quietly -- no trumpets before it. It just happens. And it happens every day! And it's not to be feared.

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Let me speak to you very quickly now -- time doesn't allow for too much of an elaboration -- but you can talk about this darkness in different ways, sometimes as the dark night of the soul, when you suffer depression and despair, and you wonder if you'll ever be able to get through. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that I think God is saying to us that there are even treasures to be experienced in the darkness? -- in the dark night of the soul? There are some things that we learn through depression that we do not otherwise learn. And any man who has persevered through what seemed like the imponderable, knows exactly the blessing that comes at the end of the tunnel.

Physical limitation, illness, can be like the dark night for the body. But there are some lessons, some treasures that a person discovers only when he's flat on his back that otherwise he might never know. The one thing that this world needs, perhaps more than anything else, is that we might be able to identify with other people, and the one segment of society that needs this more than anything else, more than any other group, may be those who are suffering in one way or another.

Take physical suffering. Will you be very patient with me now, indulge me for a moment, will you? For some unexplainable reason I have a swollen tendon, inflamed. It gets me awake hour after hour during the night, like a sharp pain that I can't possibly control. The physician, capable and skilled, is trying to correct it, hoping not to use surgery. Yet in the morning when I go to bandage it all over again, and I get some hot water on it, there's a temporary relief, just temporary.

Now listen to me carefully and be patient with me: something as very,

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very insignificant as all this, a pesky limitation that has come my way, has brought me to the place where I can identify, if only in degree, with a precious soul in this parish who suffers day after day and night after night with arthritis, and she takes the good portion of any morning to apply the hot compresses to provide what seems like the temporary relief, that loosens up the joints only for a little while. Mine is so insignificant alongside of hers, and I don't welcome mine and I wouldn't wish mine on any of you. But hidden in this limitation I am allowed an identification, to a small degree, with someone whose suffering is far greater than mine.

So God says to Isaiah, "Go on, Isaiah, tell them. Maybe they won't believe you, but tell them not to be afraid of the dark."

Centuries later there was someone by the name of Jesus Christ who came upon the scene, and something was said about Him, that His was the kind of light that no darkness could ever put out. But it's only in the darkness sometimes that people discover the light of Jesus Christ. Maybe the thing that you and I need to pray for more than anything else, to be able to see in the dark. So we ask God to give us eyes that we may see.

Very shortly now, perhaps immediately, you'll hear Mr. Clawson beginning something on the organ, because now as this sermon concludes, Frank Catchell is going to sing for us, an experience in four verses, four stanzas, the testimony of the blind ploughman, whose eyes were taken away that his soul might see through the darkness

"Set my hands upon the plough, My feet upon the sod
Turn my face towards the east, and praise be to God!

Every year the rains do fall, the seeds they stir and spring,
Every year the spreading trees shelter birds that sing.

From the shelter of your heart, Brother, drive out sin,
Let the little birds of faith come and nest therein.

God has made his sun to shine on both you and me,
God who took away my eyes, that my soul might see!"

- - The Blind Ploughman

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen

O GOD, Our time is almost up, yet before we go from this place there are still some things that we'd like to ask from you.

We'd like to ask you to assure us in whatever way you see fit, that once this hour is over, that something of the joy that we've known here can continue in our lives, that some of the things we say we believe here may become a motivating force by which we live beyond these walls.

We'd like to ask you, Heavenly Father, to keep reminding us that you love us. We need to remember it.

We'd like to ask you, Heavenly Father, to tell us again that unless those of us who are older become like little children, there's no place in the Kingdom. Help us, then, to trust your care all over again, help us to believe that what you say we can honestly trust.

So we pray, Heavenly Father, asking of you these things.

We're not going to ask you right now to tell us that you forgive us - - that's already happened in this service. Now when we go we want to ask you to let your Holy Spirit remind us of it, so that having been told that we're forgiven, maybe this week we'll sin a little less than we did last week.

OUR FATHER.....

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"NO THORNLESS WORLD"
(II Corinthians 12:9)

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To those who are college alumni, to those who are parents of sons or daughters being numbered in graduating classes, this is the time of the year when we think of commencement. Naturally I am thinking of my alma mater. It's a number of years now since we were students together on that quiet college campus in the hinterland of Pennsylvania. We were students during the depression years. Would you believe it that our professors, as part of their responsibility, had to go out and beat the bushes in order to recruit students? They appeared before high school assemblies, before different young people's groups, before churches, Luther League gatherings, doing what they could to interest students in going to college.

The almost incredible thing is that there were just about fifty in my graduating class from college. That means, of course, that we got to know one another. I'm thinking specifically of the one who sat near me, when he did come to class, and when he was there it seemed as though he slept through most of the session. Interestingly enough, he was the only one of our group to go on to become a millionaire!

...now for any college student who might be here who has a fanciful notion at this point, let me disabuse you at once, that there's absolutely no relationship whatsoever between these two facts...they are completely unrelated.....

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...he just made his million by exploiting his background -- he was of Pennsylvania Dutch stock. He's established a chain of restaurants here on the eastern seaboard. There are two of them between here and my home town, and whenever I head for the hills of home I usually stop for a break and to eat in either of them.

I recall as I first sat on the stool at the lunch counter in one of those restaurants, and while I was waiting for the specialty of the house, so it would seem -- shoo-fly pie dessert -- to be served, I was reading some of the Pennsylvania Dutch sayings that had been placed on plaques. There was one -- you've seen it, haven't you? --

THE HURRIER I AM, THE BEHINDER I GET

or this other one, which is a real reading of life:

WHY ARE WE SO LONG SO DUMB, SO SHORT SO SMART?

Life, you see, does have certain lessons that it unfolds for us, certain secrets that are made plain to us only as we journey along life for a certain road. Now that brings me to today's text. It's recorded as the 9th verse of the 12th chapter of the second letter that Paul wrote to a group of Christians in Corinth:

"My grace is sufficient for thee, for
my strength is made perfect in weakness."

This is the answer that the Apostle Paul got when he complained to God about a burden that so easily wore him down. The answer simply indicates that he's to expect life to be burdensome, that no man can handle it unaided, that no man can ever get the upper hand without divine assistance.

This is the thing that so many of us fail to learn as early as we ought,

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and it's only as life brings us to our knees, it's only after we've been "so long so dumb" that we become "so short so smart." So in reality, I'm not going to preach to you this morning upon the text itself, but rather treat as a consideration the basic principle which is necessary for an appreciation of the text.

Some people never begin with the fact that life is too much for us. Let's have done pretending. Let's recognize at once that no man is big enough and brave enough, and good enough, to handle life all by himself.

I also visited my alma mater, a theological seminary, this past week, and while there I recalled, quite enthusiastically, those professors for whom I have high regard, even as I held them in high regard as a student. It was the man who headed our Department of Pastoral Theology, and how on more than one occasion he spoke to us in this spirit: "Gentlemen, when you go into a church of your own, and look down on your own people from your pulpit, you'll be often tempted to assume that they all look contented, successful, prosperous, without a care in the world. Keep constantly reminding yourself that this is never the case. Under the seemingly placid surface of their lives are running strong currents of desire, fear, worry, perplexity. There is far more real need there than you can ever measure, and now and then some of it will be revealed to you." That professor is dead and gone now these many years, but his words are truer than ever.

As one who has been privileged to come to this sacred desk for more than fourteen years, I know full well that when I stand here I look out over a congregation to whom I am able to serve as a pastor. That means I have been listening in on human hearts for more than a decade. If I were to invite any

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one of you to come and stand in the pulpit alongside of me, and in an guarded whisper I would say, "Do you see that person in the third pew? — let me tell you about the problem that that person carries around in his heart"and then I'd say, "Do you see in the seventh pew, over there to the right — let me tell you about the burden that so easily weighs her down"so I might go from pew to pew, and almost person to person,

... and then you, if you were standing alongside of me, would say, "I would never have believed it — it doesn't seem possible!"

The fact remains: every single one of us eventually finds life too much.

Oh, in reality, if I had not had the old professor to tell me this in seminary, there would be no excuse for my not beginning my years with some appreciation for it. You see, in my first year in seminary I roomed in the middle floor in the dormitory, which meant one night as I sat at my desk I was within five feet of the student above me, who had opened his window, dove from it, fell directly by my window to the ice-hardened earth below and his sudden death. He was a preacher's son. He was in his final year of theological study. He was weeks away from graduation. When the sainted John Aberly, the President of the Seminary, led us students in the memorial service, he took as his text the words from Psalm 139:

"Search me, O God, and try my heart"

...laying before us the solemn responsibility of examining ourselves, lest as we go through life we become insensitive to those who have problems. You see, for his sake, we might have known, but we didn't. For the most part none of us ever knew him to have a problem....and what is more, if he had a problem, to know that he was unable to handle it.

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Now, for some of us who have been able to head down the road of life, covering a significant distance, we stop every now and then to reflect. It's a salutary experience and anyone over forty knows far better than those under forty how genuinely beneficial it can be, this whole business of taking time to reflect. Really now, they're making quite an enterprise of this thing and setting up here and there around the country what they call "career development centers" and many a person at mid-point is challenged and stimulated anew by depth probing and evaluation, just little more than professionally guided reflection.

So, what have we learned? Here's one who is quick to put his hand up and to volunteer an answer: the world is too much for us. It's constantly confronting us with problems that man, unaided, cannot meet, cannot master. Said one commentator on our text, "There's one of the secrets of life -- like this text -- that we're bound to wind up with. We learn it sooner or later by being battered about and growing old and dying. Why not get a running jump on living and start with it? The world is too strong for us."

Honestly now, don't ever be ashamed to admit that you're a religious person because you happen to have discovered that you are a dependent creature. You know what? -- I'm fairly convinced that's one reason why some young people fall away from the church. They can't wait until they become independent, go it on their own, because they are fairly intelligent, creative, daring, and now somewhat affluent, they do quite well. So well, in fact, that their industry and creativity take them so far that they easily, if not deliberately, bow God out of the picture. And it continues, perhaps, until the forties of life begin. After three decades have run their course, could it be that by

this time a man's about to be exposed to a sizeable chunk of life...

...with its crippling arthritis, for which no human being
can provide a cure....

...with its life-ebbing-death-creeping cancer, which no
single human being can completely arrest....

...with guerilla war-fare of some sort or another at home
and abroad, and in the face of it most of us remain
bewildered and confused....

...with tragic death on land, sea and air...financial reverses....

...alienation in the most intimate of personal relation-
ships, whether it be husband-wife, parent-child, neighbor,
in the office, in the shop, or on the street where you
live....

...so come forty, perhaps he sees no sign of promising promotions ahead...

...come forty, perhaps, he's threatened by those who are younger, and despair
and disillusionment set in....he becomes a frustrated creature as never be-
fore. From one quarter or another, from one chapter or another, the lesson of
lessons: there are forces let loose in the world that are arrayed against us!
When a pinch comes -- as most certainly they will -- the pressure is too great.

The sad truth, often found out too late -- man's feverish attempt to get
and to maintain, unaided, an upper hand, has never gotten us the success we
had dreamed.

Don't dare misunderstand me now, I would not for a minute deny the value
of education, but I do note how Horace Mann in a Boston speech, eloquently and
convincingly delivered, that with the advent of education for everyone that
crime would be wiped out, and all we'd need would be tax-supported schools.

So we've gotten bigger and better schools, and one wit also observed that we've gotten bigger and better prisons!

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"The common sense of history" -- that's it, masterly phrased by some-one, wouldn't you say? -- "The common sense of history is that man unaided can never get the upper hand on life." Some day, maybe, we'll begin to realize all over again that that Carpenter's Son-turned-preacher who used to go around telling people "Without Me, ye can do nothing" had a point. So, as one who has lived longer than he has yet to live, I think I'll wait a bit, as wait I must, for those who are young who one day will come to me and say, "Now I know what you were trying to say to us when you kept reminding us of our dependency upon God, and that man unashamedly should not hesitate to cry out to God for wisdom and guidance." I think the day will come when those who are young will soberly say....

" . . . that Sunday School teacher...my father...my mother -- they knew what they were talking about when they introduced us to the fact of God and kept reminding us that without God life itself would always turn out to be too much for us . . . "

Here's the decided advantage that the Christian has. It was the Apostle Paul who said: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Man can be made equal to the demands of life, for he has a spiritual reservoir that never runs dry, if only he will learn to tap it.

I suppose I could go on this morning, but I shan't. Let me close with an illustration that I gleaned from the pages of a book, and once I've given it to you just as I have found it, there's no need for further comment.

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A year or two ago a business man in the United States of America was driving himself to the breaking point, flying to this and that business conference, handling great affairs and costly issues. Suddenly he was stricken down with a dread paralysis. When he re-gained a measure of limited health, he confessed to his pastor, "You know, the Lord had done all that He could to make me stop and think, slow down and realize that my real life did not consist in the business I could do and the dollars that I might earn. This was the only way that He could say to me -- 'Be still and know that I am God.'"

That man is still paralyzed, but he's a ^{fisher} ~~gibber~~ and a stronger man. At Christmas-time that year he sent to his friends and former business associates a greeting card together with a poem by an unknown author, which reads as follows:

He prayed for strength that he
might achieve;
He was made weak that he might
obey;
He prayed for health that he might
do great things;
He was given infirmity that he
might do better things;
He prayed for riches that he might
be happy;
He was given poverty that he might
be wise;
He prayed for power that he might
have the praise of men;
He prayed for all things that he
might enjoy life;
He was given weakness that he might
feel the need of God."

* * * *

(This is a series of recollections from a sermon preached in Saint Luke Church by the Senior Pastor on Sunday, May 3, under the general heading: "No Thornless World")

"A SERMON FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS"

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From every quarter, O God, there are so many voices coming at us. We remain bewildered and confused. But perchance in this holy place the voice that we hear could be a genuine echo of Your voice, the voice that we need most to hear. Amen.

This sermon today, as all sermons ought to be, is a single unit. It will be delivered, however, in two parts, by two different people. The two voices that you will hear are a generation apart. One of us, as you well know, is a father; the other is a son. We have never presumed to see eye-to-eye on everything. This could be justified alone in the fact that we are a generation apart. The very fact that we have never presumed to see eye-to-eye on everything is one reason why we constitute a team ministry. Neither of us would have allowed himself to constitute a team ministry if we were completely identical. Such an arrangement would not be good for us -- it most certainly would not be good for you.

But when it comes to the basics, we are of one mind, we are of one spirit. Of this we are both certain, and for this fact we are profoundly grateful. It's because of this mutuality of genuine appreciation for fundamental values that we have not hesitated to prepare and now to deliver this sermon as a joint effort.

(DRS) The Senior Pastor this morning will address himself to a particular concern, the Generation Gap. I don't know if he can cover that whole topic, but I do know that he has particular thoughts about it. As one who is responsible for the young

people in this parish, I think I know what those thoughts will be, what he's likely to say. And once he's finished, I'd like to have the opportunity to react to what he says.

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Some time ago I had a conversation with a highly esteemed university professor. For reasons that you readily recognize, he's anticipating retirement in a few years. He's been on a college campus now for some 3 - 4 decades, which means that he's had his chance to get to know the mind of young people -- then and now.

He's the kind of professor, I dare say, that if you met him on a college campus when you had taken your son or daughter to register, you would go away from that school greatly relieved because you would have the kind of assurance that would permit you to think that if this son or daughter of yours ever had a problem, there would be on this campus one man, at least one person, to whom he or she could go with that problem or that difficulty. He is that kind of person. He listens well, he is sympathetic, he's understanding.

But once our conversation had been concluded, this conversation we had not so long ago, he of all people left me somewhat distressed, because among other things this is what he had to say: that while he couldn't help admire today's youth for much of what they think and say and do, he did find it rather difficult to communicate with them, that is, with many of them. While they talked of dialogue -- a great word for them -- he confessed that usually when he met with them they gave him a harangue-of-sorts.....and when he was inclined to listen, as becomes his nature, so frequently they just dressed him down. He's come to a very unhappy, unfortunate conclusion, that they live in a world entirely different from his.

Being unable to communicate is but one facet of the total picture of the so-called Generation Gap. It is foolish to believe that the gap isn't there. What now can be said?

I think there are three things that need to be clearly enunciated.

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First, the generation gap is not anything that is new. It is as old as mankind itself. Significantly enough, the Old Testament has as its last book the prophecy of Malachi. Malachi, as you remember from your Sunday School days, ends the Old Testament. And let me tell you now what the closing verses of the last book in the Old Testament actually are.....

...as we are being told that there is going to loom on the horizon a chosen parson from God, who will speak a very important word to God's people, who will speak before the last and terrible day of the Lord's coming. And what's to be his special assignment? -- you find it in the last words of the Old Testament -- this man, the last of the prophets, is "to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers."

...even the Bible itself admits it. Here is the avowed acknowledgment of estrangement from both ends of the parent-child relationship, and a recognition of the need for genuine reconciliation.

The second thing: we need to understand that in the generation gap, whether it be in the past or in the present, it has its basis in the sheer fact of time. Whether we like it or not, this is the fact -- the world just doesn't appear quite the same at forty as it did at twenty...it doesn't quite appear the same to a man who is fifty as it does to a man who is thirty.

This is simply true for any number of understandable and different reasons. Let me quote for you directly and precisely now what a keen student of social

behavior has said:

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"When they grow older and become parents, and see their own children come to manhood and womanhood, they may retain their zest for life, but this zest will be tempered by maturity. They will come to value the stability which provides an ordered framework for daily living. They will tend to become somewhat conservative, idealizing the time in which they were young themselves, and suspecting the novelties and the tricks of the modern world. And so will come the same tension between them and their children as they knew in their youth -- a tension which can only be fruitful if handled with understanding and a touch of humor."

(DRS) Well, what do you make of that? I know how my feelings are. I really can't disagree with what's being said. In fact, I feel pretty much the same way, that life doesn't look the same to a person at fourteen as it does when they're forty. In fact, one of the basic principles that we have at SOMEBODY CARES, which is our telephone crisis intervention counseling service for teenagers, is that we try to determine what the age is of the person who calls, because life even looks different to a person who is fourteen as opposed to a person who is eighteen or nineteen. So life does look differently to a person who may be a teenager as to the one who perhaps is over thirty.

Some of you who are here may know how difficult it was for me when I was fourteen years of age to make the adjustment of moving from a nice little community in Central Pennsylvania to metropolitan Washington. It was alright if the people of Messiah's Church in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania, didn't want my father to leave, and they wanted to have some kind of an acknowledgment of that if my folks wanted to leave -- that was fine with me. But I didn't understand why I couldn't stay there, because I had friends in that community. I didn't understand why I had to leave in the middle of a school year and be thrust into something entirely new and threatening. So life does

look different to someone at fourteen as opposed to someone who is forty.

Now, in order to communicate, or have dialogue, it is my understanding that not only does someone have to talk, but there has to be some listening. If I listened correctly, I thought I heard the Pastor say he was going to make three points, and I only heard two. So I wonder what the third one is.

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Pastor, you've always been a good listener. In fact, I remember that you used to hear me say some things that I never said at all! I did say that I would mention three things and mentioned only two -- let that be a warning to you, that's possibly a sign of age! I didn't go on to the third one. Well, let me tell you now what that third one is.

The present-day generation gap has an uncomfortable acuteness about it. I think it has a certain characterization that no previous generation gap had, and I'm pleased to analyze it in this way: the acuteness is due to a collision in values. The sharp tension between those who are young and those who are old may lie primarily in the reaction from rigid morality into an ethics of permissiveness. I suppose what frightens me more than anything else is that in the minds of some young people God is being bowed out of the picture completely. There are those who say that for the first time in our history we are confronted by a generation of young people who refuse to take God seriously. Perhaps, then, Pastor David, our Director of Youth Ministry, you'd care to speak to that.

(DRS) Not only would I like to speak to that, but I would like to add something to that as well.

First of all, let me directly respond to what you say, that this is a generation that doesn't take God seriously. Perhaps there's no question that there is a lot of foundation for this and that may be a valid statement. But I don't think this generation is really too

much different from any other generation that didn't take God seriously. I'm not about to go now and make a list of the reasons why I think this is true. But I would like to say that this is the reason why I give of myself, limited as I am, to helping young people see that God really matters in their life, and that they ought to learn to live their lives in a reference to Him.

I know I am where I am, I am what I am, I believe what I believe, because there were people when I was young who took the time to make known what God was all about. And I still believe that God cannot use any finer instrument than a human being to proclaim His truth and His word and His love. For God comes to people through people, and God comes to young people just the same.

So I'd ask you who are older to allow God to come through you. For no matter who you are or where you are, you have an influence on those who are young. And I would ask that you only make certain that you let Him come through you not only by what you preach but by the way you live.

And that leaves me to a second thought, that how can we, then, as Christians, help to bring our people together, close the gap? What can we do? -- young people and old people alike? Pastor and I have agreed on a common text for this sermon. It's simply one verse from a letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians...Paul said:

"You must look to each other's interests
and not merely to your own."

....that's the Christian approach to the generation gap.

And since this is entitled "A Sermon For Children and Parents" let me say a word, then, to those who are young.....that young people ought to recognize that they have a debt to those who are older. After all, some things did take place in this world before we arrived on the scene. We did come into a world that was ready to receive us. And furthermore, we came into this world as dependent creatures. There was a period in our life when everything had to be done for us....we had to be bathed and washed...we had to be fed....we had to be turned over. The only thing that we could do for ourselves -- was cry. No excuse for Christian young people not being grateful.

They ought also recognize that experience is a great teacher. And for this reason especially the generation gap ought to be narrowed since experience is something that's for the most part guaranteed with age. The Christian virtue that ought to be practiced is that of considerateness. It's a fine virtue of the Christian religion.

Maybe we could move closer together if young people perhaps were a little more considerate, a little more considerate. And they call this generation the NOW generation. So for young people, I'd ask them to do this now, to be considerate.

Now how about something for the older people?

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Your implication is valid, of course, Father. There is a word that's to be spoken both to young people and to the elders alike - - "A Sermon For Children and Parents." There is no one word to be spoken only to those who are young, and then an entirely different word to be spoken to those who are older.....just as there is no one Gospel for grave-diggers and electricians and plumbers as over against an entirely different Gospel for scientists and teachers. There is only one Gospel, and the Christian Gospel comes to bear upon all who receive any knowledge of Jesus Christ.

And the word, then, that I would say upon the responsibility that you suggest to me is that those who are older must recognize that they are not perfect people. There is always the temptation to allow yourself to think that just because you are older that you approximate perfection. Age and perfection are not synonymous. According to the Christian Gospel, every one of us remains a sinner until the day that he dies, so therefore those of us who are older must begin at that point: we are not perfect. We are sinful.

And I would say immediately to those who are young, regard us in this fashion. We are not perfect. But for God's sake, don't disrespect us because we're not perfect, but just give us a little bit of charity. And I presume the problem of problems is this: we who are older are called upon to exercise authority. But how can we exercise authority without becoming authoritarian? This is what turns young people away from us, when in their eyes we presume

to take the role of almost Lord God himself. We are not perfect.

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By the same token, we must look upon young people, we who are older, and say to ourselves, they aren't perfect either. How demanding we can be of them sometimes. What standards of perfection we would exact from them! -- and how on occasion we become so inflexible and so rigid. I'm constrained sometimes to fairly shout to some parents who come to see me in a counseling session: Get off your kid's back for a while -- relax a bit -- loosen the reins, if only momentarily. The fact remains he is not perfect, and neither are we.

You see, somehow we've got to learn, elders and youth alike, that we're in this thing together, and if there is a gap then both of us are responsible to help narrow it. Let me read for you something that might hold you in good stead even as it's been helpful to me. I jotted it down in a notebook that I keep. It bears the little title: "Rebellion Is Natural."

"There comes a time in the life of every young person when he begins to think and to act on his own, and to establish himself as a full person. A certain element of rebellion is a healthy and necessary reaction in the younger generation. The process of thinking through the familiar notions and the values which he absorbed during the years of childhood often take on the form of rebellion, painful to the young people, to parents and teachers alike."

Thomas Carlyle once said: "To live is a serious thing." I've lived long enough to be able to say: "To live is a painful thing." The process of maturation is painful, both for those who go through it and for those who observe others going through it. We're in this thing together. The Christian Gospel reminds us that we need each other. Children need us who are

older; and we who are older need the stimulation and the challenge of those who are young, sometimes the stimulation and the challenge that comes to us through their restlessness, and I say it quickly lest you misunderstand me, the stimulation and the challenge that also comes occasionally through their recklessness.

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But as Christians we're fortunate we have resources. We have an example in Jesus Christ. If you want to, you can build a case that there was a generation gap in His day, too. Once Mary and Joseph were quite perturbed and they took Him to task. But the Bible record has it that "Jesus Christ went down to Nazareth and was subject to them." As He grew older and entered adulthood, the Bible record says, we are given to understand that on more than one occasion when Mary couldn't quite understand, she pondered these things and she kept them in her heart.

And then, the most sublime of all tributes that youth eventually pays to age -- Jesus Christ in His final breathing moments, looks down from the cross and mentions an older person, and a woman at that, by name, in a glorious moment of recognition.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

May 17, 1970

"ON BEING SHOOK-UP"
(Acts 2:12)

Baptize us anew, O God, by
Thy Holy Spirit, even now
and in this place. Amen.

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A railroad running through a town by its very nature creates a dividing line. That dividing line becomes all the more acute if the town happens to be a small town such as the one in which I grew up. Whether it was polite or not, we did agree among ourselves that those who lived on the other side of the tracks lacked a certain something. It became pronounced as we had relationships with them in the only school in the community.

In those days we just had one school building. It housed all twelve grades, and that meant that all the youngsters in the community were thrown together. We got to know one another. We could anticipate their patterns of behavior.

We had one school principal, a man that we respected. He was the symbol of authority. It's just as though it were yesterday that I can picture him walking into our 5th grade class room and announcing that we were to have a new teacher. He introduced him as Mr. Woodward. And if I can recall his words, at least the intent of them, he told us that Mr. Woodward, he was confident, would be able to control the situation.

Now from the other side of the tracks came Clyde. And Clyde seemed to have been a self-appointed person to test any new teacher. So the day came when he tried himself out on Mr. Woodward. Mr. Woodward was equal to the occasion and said, "Clyde, you have done it once. If you ever do it again, you

might not know what hit you." (This, of course, was a number of years ago!)

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Either Clyde forgot, or he became rather bold one day, or perhaps he thought the teacher was out of the room, but Clyde did something that he shouldn't have done. From the corner of my eye I saw Mr. Woodward approaching from the back of the room.....Clyde didn't.....only to discover that there was this strong hand laid upon the back of his neck, wanked him out of his seat, shook him so vigorously that even now, would you believe me -- I can hear his shoes falling on the floor! Clyde was all "shook-up", and very properly so, because there had come a man to be equal to the situation -- he represented a kind of power that needed to be infused into that class room, a force that just had to be operative. Eventually Clyde knew what it was that hit him.

Now I'll grant you, my friend, it may be a far cry from that school building in Montoursville to an upper room in Jerusalem, centuries ago. I'll grant you it's a far cry. But something happened in an upper room in Jerusalem that shook people up too, and they were never again the same, just as Clyde was never again the same. Oh, I forgot to tell you that I'm not so sure that Clyde was as bold and as brave as he wanted us to believe that he was. Now with the perception that the years have allowed, I can look back and detect the coward that Clyde was.

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that upper room in Jerusalem was filled with cowards? Now let's get this thing in sharp focus. Let me fill in a few details for you.

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He gathered together a company of disciples. He trusted them. They were His companions. And they in turn

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made a kind of pledge to the death -- one or two of them spoke out for the rest of them and said something about no matter what others would do, they would always be found faithful, Jesus Christ could count on them. That's the way they talked before the crucifixion. And just before the crucifixion one in their number betrayed Him, another publicly denied Him, and all of them ran away, forsook Him and fled, the Scriptures expresses it classically.

Now after this had taken place, lo and behold, Jesus Christ miraculously re-appears.....and now they're confronted by the Christ that was betrayed, the Christ who was denied, and the Christ on whom they had turned their backs. You can imagine how they felt. Now they saw themselves for the cowards that they were. But God, who is love, comes forward, takes the initiative to re-establish a relationship with deniers and people who forsook and ran away.

The more I read the Bible, the more I am convinced that on more than one page there is pure basic psychology and common sense. Let me indicate for you now how Jesus handled this situation. Each one recognized himself as the coward that he was, look what Jesus did.

...He said, "All right, I'm telling you to do this --- you stay together as a group. Take my word for it and stay together as a group. Don't leave town."

...I suppose in the jargon of today it could have been put: "Play it cool!" "Lie low" -- "Stick together --- take yourself out of circulation".....and that's exactly what they were told to do and that's exactly what they did, so for at least seven weeks they huddled together as a little group.

Now, you know human nature well enough to know how they probably behaved. When you get a small group together and they're huddled there as a close-knit

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company, they begin thinking about themselves and they begin thinking about the others in the group. It's the easiest thing in the world for a guilt-stricken person to think that the shame of somebody else is far greater than his own. So they must have reasoned among themselves that the chap who betrayed was a far greater sinner than the rest of them, or they might have said among themselves that when Peter denied, he was committing a sin that was far greater than just running away, seeking shelter and cover at a safe distance. It's a diabolical thing about human nature, that when we become guilt-stricken, we look for somebody else that we think ought to be far more guilt-stricken than we, and we begin branding them. You can well imagine what that little company was like.

I'm pleased to think of it, for the moment at least, that it must have been the original 'sensitivity group' -- when they were there huddled together doing nothing but looking at each other. And after seven weeks of it, together they must have recognized how weak and impotent they actually were.

Then, if you'll let me put it this way, after Jesus Christ had allowed the situation to simmer to that point, there comes the infusion of the Holy Spirit. That second chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles expresses it magnificently: "As they were gathered together -- "

....they they couldn't even describe it -- they attempted to describe it, but something hit them, and there was one in their group, yester-year's big-fisherman-now-become-preacher, Peter by name, who made it his business to find out what it was that hit them.....and from that time on he was forever laying it on the line and telling people.

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The upshot of it was that they were not meant to be defeated, just as God could not be defeated, just as Jesus Christ arose from the dead and re-appeared with power, so they could become empowered, and they actually were. Having been made so low, now they were lifted up, by the power of God. They were God-possessed, they were Spirit-baptized. They are the ones who went out, and as one writer of Scriptures says, "They turned the world upside down." The glorious message of course is the infusion of power, when God-who-can't-be-defeated comes and shakes people up by His indwelling Spirit.

Most of us are being pretty well shook-up these days by any number of different things, but I think the time has come when we ought to be shaken by God. Whether we care to admit it or not, most of us are running scared through life, and we allow ourselves to become intimidated, we're frightened. We are hesitant, we don't know for what we stand and where we ought to stand. Maybe it's the coward's streak in us that allows us to say we're bewildered and we're confused. Maybe the time has come most certainly when God now can break in and shake us up, if we'll be obedient enough to let Him possess us as that handful did.

I know it's with some risk that we do the kind of thing that we're going to do today during the Vesper Period when we have the Confirmation Service, even as we did it last year. Let me tell you a bit about it right now. It's something that we've especially designed for the youngsters of Saint Luke Church. To my knowledge it's not done elsewhere.

They'll be robed in their special Confirmation gowns, they'll be standing at the rear of the Nave, the choir, this choir, will have processed...the choir will be in its place. Then as the Pastor who is going to confirm them, I will stand here at the chancel step, and I will call back to the forty-three boys

and girls: "What is it that you believe about Jesus Christ?"

...then as with one voice they will recite Luther's magnificent interpretation of the Second Article of the Creed, which is a classic definition of who Jesus Christ is, what He did, and what my responsibility must be to the redemptive deed of God in Christ.

Then after they've done that, this choir will sing, "Come, Holy Spirit" and the members of the class will process behind the banner which members of the group have especially designed and made....but as they start coming down the aisle the entire congregation should turn, and face them, in a welcoming gesture.

Now this is the risk that we take: suppose some of these eighth-graders during this time, would be embarrassed, as they might well be with the awesome aspect of the moment, but suppose they looked us straight in the face. We who are welcoming them into the body of believers -- what would they find in our eyes? What would they be able to trace upon the lines of our faces? Would they find weakness? Timidity? Would they find any indication of impotence? Might they be able to see upon our faces a radiant glow, knowing that we're possessed by Jesus Christ, baptized by His Spirit?

Let me tell you something that ought to shake you up, even as it shakes me up, on more than one occasion. To all intents and purposes we, we are Exhibit A to them of what God can do with people! We're the Christians nearest at hand! The story of Pentecost is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit -- God declaring that He can't be defeated, that He's still operating in the world and operating triumphantly. The story of Pentecost gives the assurance that everything that God was able to do in and through Jesus Christ He can do in

and through us, with the limitations that we bring to Him.

Now that ought to be enough to make any man stand a little bit taller and have a brighter glow in his eyes and a measure of confidence to face a world that needs the God-possessed person more than it needs anything else.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer - The Rev. David Shaheen
Pentecost - May 17, 1970

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O GOD Our Father, Give us Your Holy Spirit in our hearts,
and in our minds, that we may ever live aright.

Give us Your Holy Spirit that we may know which path
to choose, which way to refuse; which choice to make
and which one to reject; which course of action to
take and which course of action to avoid.

O GOD, Give us Your Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds to
see what to do, strengthen our wills to choose the
right course and to stick by it. Empower our lives
to follow the right way to the very end.

OUR FATHER, Give us Your Holy Spirit to cleanse our minds
of all evil and impure thoughts, fill our hearts with
noble desires, make our lives wise with knowledge,
make our lives beautiful with love, make our lives
useful with service.

OUR FATHER.....

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There are many voices, O God, being heard in this world today, and they leave us, once we hear them, confused and bewildered. But grant that in this place and even now it could be the still, small voice of God that comes echoing into our hearts. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

It's not always given to the heart and mind of man to be angry, to be bitter and to be hostile. The other evening, after being somewhat troubled and disturbed as all of us are these days, by the clenched fist and the shouting of obscenities from one college campus to another, a grandmother, in her middle eighties, said, "Maybe you'd like to read this letter that came to me from my grandson."

He happens to be a college student -- twenty-four years of age. In the letter he said something to her, as he greeted her in his own fashion on her birthday, and he thanks her for her gracious influence upon his life. And then he recalled some of the things that she had done for him. And one thing in particular that he mentioned -- the times that he sat on her knee and she read him stories. It's not always given to the mind of man to be bitter and hostile. It is given to the mind of man to be gracious, and to be genteel.

We've never quite had done with the fact that we love stories. I remember on occasion when I was teaching you in class, when rarely I would put aside the prepared material and I would tell you a story, a story from the Good Book itself or a story out of a chapter in my own life. It was our salva-

tion on certain occasions, because then you came to life when a story was being told.

I'm wondering how you might react now, you members of this year's Confirmation Class, if I gave you a copy of the New Testament right now, and I would say to you: Find the story that Jesus told that you like best.

I know how some of you would react....

...JoEllen, I can well imagine you saying that you like very much the story that Jesus told about ten girls who were invited to a wedding -- I think that might have been one of your favorites...

...as far as you're concerned, Tom, I think your story might have been the one about a man who was blind, and Jesus Christ had love and mercy and compassion and gave him back his sight....

Oh, I could go member after member in the class, knowing you now as well as I do, and name the stories that Jesus told that found a particular spot in your heart.

I'm wondering if you would be kind enough now to let me tell you one of the stories that He told that I've never wanted to forget. I have many favorites that He told, you might well believe that. In the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke we have recorded three stories that Jesus told. They all have the same theme.

One of those stories tells about a man who was a shepherd, and the shepherd had the responsibility of caring for 100 sheep. In the morning he'd take them out to find pasture and then when the darkness would set in he'd bring them back to safety, to whatever enclosure he could find, like a cave or a fold that

(588-5440)

he himself had built. He had 100 sheep, you remember I said that, and when they came back at night he would stand there at the entrance to the cave. There are many who stoutly maintain that he had names for every one of the hundred. But for our purpose now, let's see him standing there . . .

" . . 95...96...97...98...99.....one's missing!"

When Jesus told that story, He said that the shepherd stopped right there, and probably made the necessary arrangements to have somebody watch over those 99 sheep, then he himself went out into the darkness, at the peril of his own life, and he kept looking just for one sheep, until he found it.

Whenever Jesus told a story He told it for a purpose. The reason why He told this story was to have people understand the nature and character of God. What is God really like? Don't let anybody fool you, I don't think the question-of-questions in people's minds is: "Is there a God?" Life has its own way of making people become aware of the fact that there is Someone, by whatever name they call him, over and above them. I don't think the question-of-questions is "Is there a God?" - - but for any man who begins to think, the question is: "Well, what's He like?" And this is where the Christian has a decided advantage. For the Apostle Paul once said, when he was thinking about Jesus Christ, "In him all the fulness of God is pleased to dwell." And the Christian has an idea of what God is like because of Jesus Christ and some of the stories that Jesus told, to say nothing of the revelation that has come to us through Jesus Christ. So Jesus told this story: God is like a shepherd who has concern for a single person.

Now while that tells us what God is like, that also tells us what God thinks of us, what we're like. That's the other side of the coin.

Do you know what you're really like? You're like someone, in fact I should

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tell you, you are someone who is the object of God's love. And I've lived long enough to honestly believe that that's the most important single truth that any of us might ever know. You've heard me say sometimes on occasion that we have a staff member around here who sometimes puts in her office a simple statement: "I AM LOVED" -- and that's what a Christian can always say to himself: I am loved -- I am loved by God.

You are young. There is much that lies ahead. There will be much of life that will be thrown at you, and much of the untoward in life will try to destroy in you the belief that you are an object of God's love, that God cares for you, that of all the people on the face of the earth, God knows that you exist. Don't ever lose sight of that precious thought.

I suppose if I would have given the printer in time a title for this sermon, you could never guess what the sermon would be entitled. It would be rather cryptic and hidden...

...you know, when the Church was young, and Christians gathered together, sometimes they had to use a signal to communicate with one another, they had to use some hidden symbol that would indicate their message to each other -- like down in the catacombs they drew the picture of a fish or a shepherd's rod, it allowed them to believe that a Christian had passed that way.....

If you had my sermon title printed in front of you now, I think this is all that you would read: 588-5440.

I should have done it, because you live in an age of numbers -- a number for this and a number for that in this computerized era of ours. And so in

a certain sense I should have given you a sermon title cryptically concealed in a number: 588-5440.....

...that's the number that people dial, young people, from eight o'clock at night until two o'clock in the morning, when they're given to be told that somebody cares. So I say to you: 588-5440 - - somebody cares for you - - God.

And He sent Jesus Christ into the world to prove it, and to give you proof that you might believe it, He even suffered and died to show you how much He loves you.

Take your way through life now, from this moment on, reflecting the fact that you are being loved. It's the tremendous truth, and you already found it out. The sad thing would be that you might ever forget it.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON NOT LIVING IN VAIN"

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Help us, O God, to understand that it's the Holy Spirit who is the preacher. Therefore, let not this frail human vessel become an impediment, a deterrent to the truth which could lay upon the hearts of these Thy people. Give us receptive ears and a willingness to believe that the echh of Your voice can be heard even now. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

There are, as you know, many advantages that come to the person who has the good fortune to grow up in a small town. Take the opportunity of getting to know Raymond Worthington as a good example. He was the man who came from the hills beyond my home town and was appointed by the town clerk and the town council to serve, wáll I suppose the title he'd have today would be: Superintendent of Streets and Sewers. Raymond, as a retired farmer, brought along with him one of his horses, one of his wagons. And his job was to make sure that the streets in that small town were properly maintained.

You ought to know that we had a Main Street, of course. It was the only paved street. It was paved with brick, and if my memory serves me aright, all the other streets were dirt streets, which meant that Raymond has a very busy season, come spring. And he'd go around to the three different furniture factories in the town, to what seems to me now to have been huge piles of cinders or ashes, and he'd load up that wagon of his and drive through the

different streets in the town, then fill up the ruts, the gutters and the pot-holes.

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That wagon of his, as I remember it, had a very interesting bed. It was made up of what looked to me then as huge wooden planks, but they could be easily disengaged, you see, and the wagon would become a kind of a dump-truck affair, so that the ashes would just drop down where he would need them.

He was the benign character, and he allowed some of us youngsters to come along behind him and to partake of that great enterprise. I think my interest in roads goes back to my relationship with that Superintendent of Roads in that small town.

You can readily understand why, then, when Winifred and I were first married, how we were quite intrigued with the fact that they were going to pave the street outside the house in which we lived in our first parsonage, in a town not very far away from my home town. We were awakened every morning with the road-building crew that arrived. Those were the days of the Works Project Administration, the WPA. Times were so hard, a man had to live, and so in order to maintain his dignity he got a relief check, but he worked for it. They brought the stones down from the nearby mountain, but yet they had to be broken into much smaller bits, and it was the crew that came along, with their sledge hammers, and they hammered away until they broke those stones into finer bits. They were road-builders, and naturally I was intrigued and fascinated.

This is another reason why I was brought to more than usual attention when I learned of a play that was written by an Irish playwright, and it deals with the famine condition, the hard times, of Ireland back in the middle of the 19th

century.....

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...the playwright has one of his characters coming home, and as he comes home at night he comes fresh from his works project: in order to maintain his human dignity he was given a job in those hard days, and he was building a road. And one night when Michael comes home he laments to his father, "Well, we're kept busy, alright, we're building a road. But it doesn't go anywhere!"

This is parabolic, perchance symbolic, of much of the activity that's going on in our day. We're given feverishly to a kind of activity, we're building roads that lead to nowhere. If I remember my history correctly, roads have always been terribly important. You can judge a civilization by the kind of roads it was able to build and to maintain,....the channels of communication taking a person from one place to where he ought to go or to where he ought to be. Roads are that important -- important only as long as they lead some-where, and allow you to arrive at a desired destination. The tragedy of our day is that all too many people's lives are like roads that lead nowhere.

If I understand the Christian religion aright, it is a religion of accountability and a religion of responsibility, and God is going to hold us accountable and God's going to hold us responsible for the way our energies are directed and the net result which constitutes the outcome of the things that claim our time and energy.

I tell you this because I am convinced, as I think of our day, that a word that seems to have been dropped from our vocabulary is accountability, responsibility. Ask any man who has under his direction a staff, and chances are he may tell you that the problem of problems with which he has to deal constantly is

getting people to assume the responsibilities, to do the job that's expected of them. You may look upon it in any way that you wish....

...a father and a mother sometimes go to bed vexed and irritated because they just can't quite get their children to measure up to their responsibilities....

...and I suppose if children could speak and articulate, they might take their parents to task because they're not measuring up to the things for which God is most certainly going to hold them accountable, and responsible.

Now going back to the earlier word. God has given each of us a chapter in time that most certainly is meant to lead somewhere. God has given each of us a life, and if I understand the Christian religion aright, it is a religion of accountability and responsibility. And God holds us responsible for what we do with our life. No man's life was ever meant to be lived in vain. It was meant to be lived purposefully, and that a measure of fulfillment could be realized.

There's a chapter, the 12th chapter in fact, of Luke's gospel, that has always gripped my soul. I think there are several reasons for it: it brings Jesus Christ into a particular kind of focus that you and I don't usually hold Him in that regard. So often it's easy for us to think of Jesus as gentle, meek and mild. But Jesus Christ could have fire in His eyes, and on occasion there could be thunder in His voice. He had His times when He could become infuriated with people, and justifiably so. This 12th chapter is one of those occasions.

He's talking about a man, and talking to a man, who had gotten along very well. He had amassed a sizeable fortune. Now there's nothing wrong with that.

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Some of us envy those who have fared that well, and who couldn't use more money than he presently has? -- and his desire to have it would be to direct it nobly, and toward worthy causes. There's no reason to believe, as you read this record in the 12th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke which serves as the basis for this sermon, that the man had acquired his wealth dishonestly. There's every reason to believe that he was a hard worker. There's reason to believe that perhaps he was a shrewd investor. And this is an admirable quality! He had a way of making one dollar become five.

But now he had a peculiar problem on his hands. He didn't quite know how to handle what he had, how to hold on to it. And to that man Jesus Christ, and I dare say with fire in His eyes and thunder in His voice, said, "You are a fool, because tonight your soul is going to be required of you!"

And what does that mean? -- except that we should understand that God holds us accountable, and God holds us responsible, not with what we have or don't have, but what we do with what we have, and in what direction we send it, meaningfully and purposefully.

You see, you can't deny the fact that the Christian religion is a religion of accountability and responsibility, and the Christian religion is a religion that deals with judgment. Significantly enough, much that Jesus Christ talked about in His latter days upon earth were parables of judgment. And what is judgment, but to take a person to task and to hold him accountable?

I get annoyed sometimes when I read about certain tracts and books that are written along this theme: HOW TO MAKE YOUR LIFE COUNT. You don't need to read a book like that, because every man's life is going to count. The question is whether it counts for good or for ill. God placed us here on earth that our

lives might count for good, that a man might not live in vain.

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I want to tell you this but I don't want you to press me too far into a theological corner: I have my moments when I think that one reason why God put Jesus Christ here on earth was to give us a kind of Exhibit A, to show how it's absolutely possible for one life to come into complete and perfect fulfillment.....how in the time of judgment it is possible for one life to be able to give a good accounting, and to show how it is possible, to show how one could have lived responsibly. You see, man essentially is bewildered and confused. He doesn't quite know what he ought to do and how he ought to live. So Jesus Christ becomes Exhibit A.

Look at Him that way only for a moment.....

...you recall, barely a teenager when He's found in the temple

and He gives that classic answer: "But don't you know,

I've got to be about my Father's business!"

...at an early age the impression is made upon Him that

He's going to be held accountable, that He's to live

responsibly.....

...then the years pass, and even in that last week, in the

Garden of Gethsemane, the Father in Heaven still holds

Him responsible and accountable to the extent that Jesus

Christ, so much aware of it that He says, "All right -- if

this is the responsibility that the Father thrusts upon

me, very well."

There are many ways to picture Judgment, and the Lord Jesus Christ never ruled judgement out of the picture. Let me say it again, if the Christian religion is anything, it is a religion of accountability and responsibility.

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It is a religion that continues to talk about Judgment. And a man's life is to be understood in the Christian concept, that he has a destination, that he's headed for somewhere. Don't become impatient with this magnificent liturgy of the Lutheran Church. Don't say it's meaningless repetition. The words are valid. The fault does not lie in the words, the fault lies perhaps in our thoughtless repetition. But remember how often in the liturgy the eternal dimension is introduced -- the implication is that a man is going to be held responsible for the progress that he makes, or doesn't make, on the road he was meant to travel toward Heaven.

Now let me close by reminding you that there are many ways to picture Judgment. Let me give you a quite unorthodox one, and I'm going to draw on the experience of that great soul for Jesus Christ of another generation called Studdert-Kennedy.....

....he didn't picture Judgment and being held accountable as over against brimstone and fire and damnation and all the pang and torment of Hell. But he pictures Judgment in this way: Man having lived the days of his years, his time on earth is ended, his chapter here completed. It's all over. No other chance. Not another day.and Jesus Christ stands in front of him, and He looks back over all these days and years that God had given, and Jesus Christ simply looks at the man and says, "Well -- what did you make of it?"

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

O GOD, There is so much for which we could ask for ourselves. There is so much that we need that we can ask You to give us.

O GOD, Hear our prayer for all the people of the world. Hear our prayer for our country, for all mankind.

O GOD, Send peace to this world.

Bring to an end forever the time when men kill and slay and destroy;

bring in the time when all men will live in brotherhood together.

Bring to an end the time when governments will pour out millions of dollars on weapons of destruction, while men and women still have not enough to eat, and while they still live in conditions unfit for any human being to live in.

Bring to an end the day when men seek to impress their wills and their systems upon others;

bring in the day when men will learn to think differently and govern differently, and yet to live in peace.

O GOD, Bring to an end all hatred between race and race;

bring in the day when no man will be despised or treated as an inferior because of the color of his skin, bring in the time when there will be equal justice and equal opportunity for all.

O GOD, Bring to an end the time of religious intolerance, bring to an end the time when men love systems more than they love You, when they love what they call the Church more than they love Jesus Christ;

bring in the day when all those who claim the name of Christian will be one.

O GOD, Bring to an end the day of conflict between class and class; bring to an end the time when there is tension and enmity between those who have and those who have not, between those who employ and those who are employed;

bring in the day when the welfare of one will be the welfare of all, and when all men will live as one family together.

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O GOD, Bring to an end the day of conflict and suspicion between
~~XXXX~~ nation and nation.

Raise up leaders who will seek neither power nor
prestige, and who will dedicate themselves to
finding the way for all men to live in unity
together, all for each and each for all.

ESPECIALLY BLESS all those who seek to make known the name of
Jesus throughout the world. In their difficulties give
them courage, in their loneliness give them the con-
sciousness of Your pr4sence, in their preaching give
them power, in their lives give them beauty.

O GOD, Who made all men of one family to live upon the earth,
Help us to work and to pray for that day when there
will be one fold and one Shepherd. Through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

OUR FATHER . . .

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June 7, 1970

"AGAINST THE SAVAGE ILLS OF LIVING"
(John 16:2)

WE HAVE so little time, O God
to do this sort of thing, to
gether together and to sing
Thy praise, to meditate upon
Thy truth, to share the fellow-
ship of the company of believers.
We have so little time to do this
sort of thing. Help us to make
the most of it, right now.
Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our
Lord. Amen.

Let me do a very unconventional thing, and give you the end of the sermon
before you hear the beginning. It has to deal with that final scene in the
diary of Anne Frank....

...you may remember, she was the Jewish child, together with
her family and relatives and others, who found themselves, for
a while at least, knowing some measure of protection and
shelter against the forces in the world that were let loose
against them. It's one of the most dramatic things to come
out of World War Two.....but then a diabolic influence laid
hold upon someone, and their hiding place was revealed, and
they were carted off to a concentration camp, and then to
have their life taken away from them. Do I remember correctly
that the last recorded page in her Diary reads something like
this: "I still believe that people are good at heart."

Being away from one's desk for a week - -

..now the beginning of the sermon....

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- - being away from one's desk for a week can mean many things. It can most certainly mean the accumulation of mail on one's desk. So as I returned to my desk yesterday, if you would have been standing alongside of me and looked over my shoulder, you might have noted how my hand was drawn rather instinctively to one letter, in particular, of all that was piled there. I can't quite explain why I was drawn to it except perhaps that I noted at once that it had a very attractive envelope, and a colored one at that...it was handwritten....and it was the thickest of all the envelopes. Maybe subconsciously I said to myself, this must be a very personal message. And so it was, more so than I had anticipated.

Very properly, let me fill you in on some details that you must have in order to appreciate all that I am now telling you. She's still a teenager, she has not yet completed her second decade of life. And yet for some of us who have come to know her, she's almost lived a lifetime and more in this not-quite-two-decades of her existence.

She has a quotation in that letter. It continues to stare me in the eye, because in the letter she tells me something that her brother said to her. He, too, is still in his teens, not twenty yet. He's had a lot happen to him. He's had his moments when he's faced life with hostility, he's had his moments when you'd first meet him, that you're not so sure that you'd care to carry on a conversation with him. The quotation is this, as she recalled what he said to her as he was about to be shipped off to Vietnam:

"Give me one good reason for living!" - - and then the second sentence of the quotation that consists of only two words: "Life stinks!"

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She says in her letter to me, "I wish I could have helped him then, but I couldn't, because I quite agreed." "Now," she says in her letter, "I pray for him every day."

Something has happened to her. She's had a conversion experience, she has surrendered her life to Jesus Christ. That makes all the difference in the world for her. But for him, how sad that one in his beginning years of life (and the first two decades of life are still to be classified as beginning years) -- that he should face life with a premise like that -- "It stinks."

Today's sermon bears the title, "Against The Savage Ills of Living"; and the text is the second verse of the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to John, which constitutes another quotation, words that come from the lips of Jesus Christ, a man who had not yet completed his third decade of living, and He had something to say about life.

Significantly enough, He was saying it to a band of people who were His trusted friends. They had spent almost three years together, and occasionally they had those treasured and cherished moments when at day's end they just got together, and He would talk to them. And of all the things that they had experienced that day, He'd now give it a divine perspective, and they'd look at the happenings through the lens of Jesus Christ, their friend and their Master.

I haven't scrutinized the record carefully enough, but I'm inclined to tell you that the text which serves as the basis for this sermon was part of perhaps His last real conversation with them. He was anticipating what was ahead for Him....Calvary....crucifixion on a lonely hill....He was looking ahead to a ghastly world. Now because He loved them as much as He did, He wanted to prepare them against the kind of a world that they would have to live in, and

He laid it on the line. He gave them the unvarnished truth. You want to hear the text now?

"They shall put you out of the synagogues; yes,
the time is going to come that whoever kills you
will think that he's doing God's work."

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In His day they called Jesus by many names: some were good and some were bad. A careful reading of the life that He lived and what He taught will show that whatever else He was, He was no starry-eyed dreamer. Quite to the contrary, He was a realist. And for those who would be courageous, for those who would take heart, listen, my friend, by remembering that Christ did put His disciples on guard, against a world that seems to make a habit of bitterly going wrong.

Sometimes we do Jesus Christ a great disservice by presenting Him to people as one who always saw the sunnier side of life. That He did, but He also saw the seamier side of life. He had the eternal dimension to life, and He honestly believed that in the end God would have the last word, and in the end it could be said that God is good and God is great and God is gracious and that God has not abdicated the control of the universe. But in the meantime.....

...and why don't you go ahead and emphasize and accent the first syllable, for time can be mean, and life can be ugly.....

I wish I could tell you to the contrary, but I can't. I've been listening in on human souls for three decades and I know how miserably some people can be treated. And occasionally I have to write down at the bottom of the page of the diary of my soul that this is a ghastly world, for good people.

Quite accidentally -- it wasn't planned that way at all -- before the mid-day service of the day began I was greeting some people as they came to church,

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and in less than ten-minute span of time I engaged people in conversation who told me of the burden on their heart that they were dragging along with them here to this place. In both cases life had tumbled in on them. They had been dealt an untoward blow. But of all the places to which they could have gone, and of all the things that they could have done now, they came here - - why?

...because as children of faith we are the fortunate ones

...because we are the disciples of Jesus Christ we can honestly believe that it isn't in life what happens to us that counts, it's what we do with what happens to us that matters most.

I can't tell you why we happen to live in the kind of a world that we do, that there can be the terrible black of the thunder-cloud, and the frightening flash of lightning - - I can't tell you that. I can't tell you why in almost the twinkling of an eye the lives of 50,000 people, to wit: the Peruvian earthquake, would be taken away.....any more than I could have explained to the new young widow with her eldest daughter by her side, the third way back from the front right by the aisle as she came to worship today, why a week ago yesterday, without batting an eyelash, the nearest and dearest should be taken away. But we live in a world where this kind of thing can happen, and where this kind of thing does happen.....and the most tragic of all aspects, there is a kind of evil that seems to be unleashed against people just because they happen to be good! Now try to explain that!

But I'm not so sure, if I understand the mind of Jesus Christ aright, that life is a riddle or a mystery to be explained. Life remains an experience to be lived, and not to be lived just somehow, but to be lived triumphantly. So the same Jesus Christ who could lay it on the line and tell it as it is, with all the somber, sober, sordid aspects of life, could also say, "But be of good

cheer -- I have overcome the world"

...who could also say, "Lo, I am with you always,
even unto the end."

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So one has to establish for himself what he assumes as he begins his years, when he looks out upon life philosophically, what's going to be his basic premise. Will you simply say, It's a ghastly world for good people -- and let it go at that? Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if the sermon should be concluded at this point, and the benediction should be pronounced and you would go out into the world and all you could say to yourself is, It's a world where diabolical influences are at work, it's a world that can be ugly and sordid and it can happen to me -- - this I must tell you. But you daren't go now for I must also tell you that because of Jesus Christ and because the power of God can be let loose in your life, you have been meant to live heroically, and not to succumb.

When you recall the great dramas that you've seen, and then you say to yourself, this is symbolic of the drama which is life itself -- the great moments, when it's all said and done, belong to the hero.

...the last recorded page in the Diary of Anne Frank:

"I still believe --

(let me paraphrase it now)

-- - that life can be good."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AND I HAVE SEEN A VISION"
(James 1:22)

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Speak, Lord, that we may hear,
and in our hearing that we
might understand, and that in
our understanding we might be
motivated to act, and always
in Thy Name and for Thy glory.
Through Jesus Christ Thy Son
our Lord, Amen.

This is, as you know, a unique service in the course of the year as far as this congregation is concerned. For the past few years we've been setting aside this Sunday nearest the time of the year when most of our high school seniors will be graduating, and we've introduced, very properly so, into the life of this parish the Saint Luke Baccalaureate.

Last summer when the sermon schedule for the year was being planned, even then it was made very real to me that the possibility could be mine that I would be the preacher for the service. What might I be able to say, in this day, to those who are young?

Well, first of course, the text ought to be carefully chosen. You can readily understand why one was constrained to find a text that might prove acceptable, for there ought to be at least one thing about a sermon with which people in this very critical age would agree. So the text had to be very, very carefully chosen. Would you like to hear it now? It's from the first chapter of the Epistle written by a man named James, it's the 22nd verse:

"And be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."

The text ought to appeal to you, especially those of you who are young, because if you've already given it serious attention, although it's been read so quickly, you might say to yourself, in all honesty, well, that's my kind of a text --

-- because this is a 'get-with-it' text:

"Be doers of the word, not just hearers only"

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If I understand your mind aright, one of the things that you've always criticized, when you realized that you could criticize, is that most church people don't always back up, in their deeds, what they say they profess with their lips. I suppose this is one of the very first things that those who are young are quick to notice about other people -- other people who are older, not necessarily people of their own age.

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The present generation has succeeded so well in this direction that one word that's been bandied around a great deal, more so perhaps than in any other decade in the 20th century, is that word phony. For somewhere, somehow, along the line it's been made quite plain that there's a disparity between profession and practice, between creed and conduct, between belief and behavior. Since some of us have had this thrown at us in no uncertain way, when we've had small group conferences, I can readily understand why, for those of you who are young, you're rather pleased that this happens to be the text -- "Go on, preacher -- give it to them: 'Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.'" ...for yours is the gung-ho generation, yours is the generation that's always saying, "Let's get where the action is!" Yours also is the generation that's inclined to say, if there isn't any action, let's make sure that there is.

So you want to be where the action is? Not a bad idea, really. Only one hitch, however. What kind of action? That's the point precisely. Christians

have been meant from the very beginning to 'get with it.' But they've also been cautioned to be sure of their base and the course of their action.

"Be doers of the word, not hearers only"

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One of the criticisms leveled against church people today is that (very interesting characterization) -- we're said to be "box people" -- Christians only when we're boxed in together, when we get to a place where we're surrounded by walls, and we're closed in from the world. There's really nothing new about that figure of speech. The figure of speech might be new, but the concept that lies behind it isn't new. I can go back thirty-five years ago, when I heard the shining star of Methodism, that great pulpiteer of three decades ago and more, Lynn Harold Hough -- -- he used to tell about a woman, a little old lady of lavender-and-lace....

...and every Sunday morning when it came time for church she donned her lavender-and-lace dress, and off she trod to church, and there she worshipped, and there she solemnly sang God's songs, and there she piously prayed. But as soon as the benediction was pronounced she headed for home, and the first thing she did when she got home was to take off her lavender-and-lace dress...she'd hang it back there in the corner, and that's exactly where the dress stayed until next Sunday morning.....

...Lynn Harold Hough used to drive home the point that that's exactly the way it was with her religion -- it was a lavender-and-lace religion, a kind of one-day-a-week affair. Belief lacked behavior...creed lacked conduct...profession lacked performance.

I'm delighted, of course, that this could be the text that might appeal to you - - - 'let's get with it' - - - 'let's do something.'

Let me give you some more free translations of this text, Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only:

"Quit listening! -- get where the action is!"

...or they tell me, those who are students of Greek, that the word for doers and the word for poet are one and the same. If you want another free translation, it could be:

"Well, now, get out of the audience -- stand up on the stage and recite your own poem!"

....which is also to be interpreted:

"Get up, now, and do your own thing!"

Well let there be no question about it, I share your enthusiasm for this text. Knowing you as well as I do, I would congratulate you, that you might never have done with this basic philosophy, that you might always understand that you follow a Lord and a Saviour and a Master who lived out the songs that He sang, who lived out in deed the creed that He professed. James, perhaps, was never nearer his Lord than when he spoke these words:

"Do something - - don't just listen."

You know, I've told you how I enjoy occasionally going up to the office of your Director of Youth Ministry, the Assistant Pastor, to that far corner of the second floor.....that's where you donned your gowns this morning. And if some of you were there for the first time you might have been impressed by two things: the color, the creative color that's reflected in that corner, and also the use of posters. Now did you notice the one that's presumed to be a

quotation of Buddha -- Daniel Barrigan, a Jesuit priest, has echoed those words:

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING, BUDDHA SAID, STAND THERE

Well, now, this is half of the sermon.

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The remainder of the sermon deals also with this text, but would you believe me, I want to do a very unconventional thing, and I want you to consider the text now as it's read backwards. I honestly believe that one can take this liberty. For when the text was first spoken it was spoken because a sense of balance had to be introduced. It was a day and age when the writer said people were not backing up enough their profession with their practice, so he wanted to introduce a sense of balance.

Now I'm constrained to tell you that a sense of balance has to be introduced today, and in order to accomplish that maybe we'd better read the text backward:

"Be not doers of the word only, but be hearers also"

Maybe this is the sad thing about our day -- we've never known how to listen creatively -- we've never known how to stand still long enough to get a sense of direction. It takes a great deal pf patience to be quiet. Maybe most of us can be like the person who gets a new appliance -- he's so eager to use it that he becomes fool-hardy in his eagerness, and he never much pays attention to the book of instructions, the manual for operation....and mistake after mistake is made because we didn't take time long enough, and patiently enough, to school ourselves in the method of operation. I think there's something to be said for those who say to us, when we are bewildered and confused, because we haven't taken long enough to establish a true sense of direction.

As one who has had the good fortune to confirm most of you in the Christian faith, and to stand here at this altar and to have you approach it and to have you make a promise, I would remind you of an allegiance that you have to Jesus Christ.....

...I would remind you that His was a youthful contribution to the ills of mankind. His, in a certain sense, was the first youth movement of any consequence. In fact, His great leadership on earth barely got Him to the third decade of His life.....

....but I must also remind you that for the greater part of His life He did His share of listening. He didn't, if I may use the words carefully, get 'gung-ho' until He was thirty years of age, and even as He began His ministry with the tremendous impact it made upon the world, it was that wilderness experience, where He went off by Himself and did nothing but listen, to get His sense of direction, to get His perspective, to be absolutely sure of His base of operation.

So I plead with you, on occasion read the text backward:

"Be not doers only, but hearers also"

...that you might not become lost and confused and bewildered in your attempt to change the world. I covet for you your enthusiasm. But an enthusiasm that's meant to last as long as you have a firm base on which to stand and as long as you can be sure of your direction.

Because this is a Christian service, we must remind ourselves that Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth and the life"and as He remained absolutely certain of the vision that He had, so I covet for you a vision . . .

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"For my feet have stood upon the mountains,
And I have seen a vision of beauty;
And though my heart be cast down again,
Yet will I lift up mine eyes unto the heavens;
For He that worketh in heaven
Worketh also in me;
As He hath lifted up the mountains,
So will he lift up my soul,
That I may behold the beauty of his work
in the heavens
And on the earth in the hearts of men."

Take time.....take time to listen.....again and again.

Find a place where you might have restored to you the
vision's splendor.

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(Transcribed as recorded)

"KEEP COOL AND PRAY"
(1 Peter 4:7)

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There are so many voices coming at us,
O God, they leave us bewildered and
confused. We honestly believe there
is one voice above all others that
needs to be heard. It's Your voice.
If at all possible, let us get some
echo of it right now, in this place.
Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our
Lord. Amen.

Let me suggest that you picture yourself doing something that you seldom
if ever thought of doing, and that is assuming the preacher's role. With the
gift of a sanctified imagination, suppose you were to be the preacher today,
suppose the text had been agreed upon, the 7th verse of the 4th chapter of
the first letter of Peter....now suppose you were sitting down and you were
saying to yourself, as you read the text, what's the next thing that I ought
to do?

Maybe you'd say to yourself, I'd better pray...and you might fold your
hands and bow your head and then say, "Spirit of truth, help me
to understand what this text means, and then as I better under-
stand it maybe I can help the people who will hear me preach
the sermon to better understand it.".....can you imagine
yourself thinking and acting like that?

Or maybe you might start reaching for commentaries and then you'd read
about this text as the minds and the spirit of great men have
dealt with it, and perchance something that they had discovered

might help you. Can you picture yourself doing that?

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Or can you picture yourself trying to find out what the other translations have said about this text? You see, there's more than one translation of the Scriptures. Well, if that should be your posture, and your stance, you and I are on common ground right now, because that's exactly what I did in the preparation of this sermon -- I searched out at least a half-dozen other translations to see how they expressed this basic text. Bear with me now, and I'll read some of them for you.....

J. P. Phillips, that magnificent spirit, said:

"We are near the end of all things now, and you should therefore be calm, self-controlled men of prayer"

That popular paperback edition of today's English version of the Good News For Modern Man expresses it this way:

"The end of all things is near; you must be self-controlled and alert to be able to pray"

The new English Bible says:

"The end of all things is upon us, so you must lead an ordered and sober life given to prayer"

Moffitt very cleverly says:

"Now the end of all is near. Steady, then, keep cool. pray"

That's one of my two favorite translations of the text; the other is this, the Scotsman, William Barclay:

"Be therefore steady and sober in mind, so that you will really be able to pray as you ought"

Well, let's get the historical setting for the text. It was written by a man who was numbered among a group of people who honestly believed the end of the world was at hand. Those early Christians before the end of the first century were quite convinced that the end was just around the corner. The catastrophic moment was about to occur.

Now the Apostle Peter felt constrained as God's spokesman to say something to them about this: "Well, if this should be your thinking, if you're convinced that the end is at hand, then how ought you to behave? what should you think? what should you do?"

In order to get this thing better set in our own mind, let me propose something for you, something that ordinarily you wouldn't want to consider - - -

...but suppose in some very strange way you got the inside information -- how the revelation occurred, I'm not going to suggest -- but somehow you were given the information that your life was going to come to an end, maybe Wednesday morning of this week at ten o'clock.....what would be your frame of mind? what would you think? how would you behave?

...suppose you're getting the word now before this service is over, say at twelve o'clock today you get the word....well, you have the rest of today and tonight, then you have all day Monday and all night Monday, then you have all of Tuesday, morning, afternoon and evening, and then Wednesday morning at ten o'clock it's all over - - - between now and then, ten o'clock Wednesday morning, what are you going to think? how are you going to treat

other people? how will you honestly behave? will you allow
yourself to become frightened to death?

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...well, that's about the situation of the early Church, only they took this
whole suggestion seriously - - you're not taking it seriously, but they did.
They believed that almost any day, then, the Lord would re-appear, the end
of the world would take place.

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So the Apostle Peter brought the subject up, and he had a bit of advice
for them. What did he have to say? Well, you can read it in the text between
the syllables. He said, whatever you do, you don't panic. You keep yourself
under control, you're sober-minded - - or as Moffitt says in his translation:

"You stay cool.....you keep cool....."

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...almost like a sentry on duty who has been trained to be on guard against
any eventuality, and particularly to expect the worst, so that when it takes
place he'll be ready for it. You don't press a panic button - - - that's the
advice given by the Apostle Peter, that's what you can read in this text.

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And then, mark you, after he said all of this, then Peter says, "Maybe
you will be ready to pray."

Now I think I should also tell you that in connection with this letter that
he wrote, he told those early Christians that while the end was about to take
place, until it did happen, just because they were Christians they'd have to
face a great deal of suffering, they'd be persecuted - - they couldn't escape
it. Now in the face of all that he says, "You pray, and you keep yourself
sober-minded."

Did it ever occur to you how contrary to the notion of prayer that you and

C I have, that Peter's advice is? There is that mistaken notion of prayer that you and I have. It's the one people have who think of prayer as raising an umbrella over one's head or putting into place some sort of protective shield. How off-base they are when they think that a bowed head and a pair of piously folded hands will set one on a peril-free course. It' just doesn't work out that way. The sobering thought lingers: Calvary followed Gethsemane. Prayer, properly understood, sees a man through, and not around, the obstacle course which is Life.

O The Apostle Peter said, "Alright, the end is going to come, but before the end comes you're going to do a great deal of suffering. You may have to face one impending danger after another. Now what do you do in the meantime? You keep control of yourself and you pray."

P ...and his implication was that you pray in order to see yourself through, and you don't pray in order to have the obstacles removed.

Y Now, I'll back up for a moment and I'll make an admission in your presence. I know very well that you can establish a good case for people who in the time of danger have prayed, and they have been miraculously delivered. It does happen every now and then. But it's the exception to the way that life ordinarily operates. And if you're able to brace yourself and to take it, I think I can tell you quite honestly that prayer was never intended just to provide people with an escape route. When God made us that we might be able to pray, He wasn't writing out for us a fire insurance policy to be used only in the time of an emergency. This is one level of prayer, but it's not the only level of prayer and certainly it's not the highest level of prayer. If you and I were given to praying like we would press a panic button, and then miraculously the way of

escape would come, who wouldn't turn to religion? -- who wouldn't like to have conveniently at hand an escape route?

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But I must also remind you, as far as the Christian understanding of prayer is, Jesus Christ on His knees is faced with the crucifixion...He prays....
...but the cross remains. And through prayer He is enabled to see Himself through it, and not around it.

Well that's one of the thoughts imprisoned in this text.

Jules Romaine, with I presume his sanctified imagination, tried to picture people at prayer on a Sunday morning when they had gathered together as a group of Christians. Oh, the preacher might be standing at the altar offering his prayer alright, but that wasn't necessarily the same prayer that the people back in the pews were praying. He pictures every one of them with a selfish petition....he pictures every one of them asking God to provide some kind of an escape route. Let me give you the quotation from Jules Romaine . . .

"O God in heaven, vouchsafe to cure my leg -- "

"O God, fill my shop with customers -- -- "

"O God, help me to find out if my servant John is robbing me -- "

"O God, cure my sore eyes -- -- "

"Save me, O God, from being drunk so often -- -- "

"Lord, help my son to pass his examination -- -- "

"Lord, help me to make her fall in love with me -- -- "

"O God, if I could only find a job -- -- "

"O God, my husband, he makes a martyr of me -- let me die!"

Don't you dare misunderstand me, with the compassionate heart that I've asked God

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to give me these three decades in the ministry, I wouldn't seek any man short who cries out to God recklessly and with complete abandon from the depth of his despair, asking God to suit a blessing to his particular need. But by the very same token, if your prayer and my prayer begins and ends with my little world and your little world, then we haven't understood prayer at all correctly.

Well, that's one thing that I can tell you about the advice that the Apostle Peter was giving to these people who live against the prospect of the end. They were to pray, but that's the spirit in which they were to pray, that they might be made equal to every impending peril that they would have to face until the end came.

Then will you also notice that when he said they should pray -- only after they had taken themselves to task -- only after they got themselves under control -- only after they were alert -- only after they were sober-minded. And that's a far cry from the conduct of many of us. We want to press the prayer button, and then we want all of these other things to happen. But every one of these translations that I read for you strikes the note that prayer, to be effective, can be effective only after we've brought ourselves under control, only after we are kept cool, only after we are sober-minded -- -- then we'll know how to pray aright.

Maybe the Apostle Peter could be speaking to our day in a far more relevant fashion than some of us are willing to admit. Do you know that there are students of human behavior who tell us that those who are young are inclined to behave as recklessly and with such excessive behavior as characterizes our youth because they are the first generation of young people of the nuclear age, who are being told by some people that they do face the prospect of never

bringing out their live to a natural conclusion, because there is always the possibility that we might trip ourselves up and bring down complete annihilation upon ourselves? so that for them in a very real sense the end could be at hand?

What, then, should God's spokesman say to them? -- to all of us who live in this age? - -

Be steady...be sober-minded...keep cool. Then pray.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer offered by Pastor Raymond Shaheen
June 21, 1970

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O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the great King and Head of the Church: We pray for Thy servant Robert J. Marshall, our chief pastor, President of the Lutheran Church in America. Endow him with wisdom from on high, that he may discharge his obligations in our behalf, and in Your Name, in a way that will be pleasing in Your sight;

We pray, O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the great King and Head of the Church, Thy blessing upon every delegate to the convention. May he seek Thy wisdom, and may Thy Spirit possess his mind, that the Church may speak significantly to our day;

O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the great King and Head of the Church, hear our prayer for those who minister in Thy name throughout the world, particularly for those whose lot is cast in difficult places;

O GOD, GOD of Peace, hear our daily prayer for peace in a world that's broken and bleeding, tattered and torn, that Your kind of peace may come, first within the hearts of men, then between men and for the nations of the world.

O GOD, Bless these Thy people now who wait in this holy place, and once they've gone may they take with them an assurance of Thy continuing presence, Thy supporting strength, that as they persevere with patience they may continue to run the course which has been laid out for them.

Bless, we beseech Thee, O God, our fathers and the memory that we have of our fathers, of those because of their particular relationship to us, and our role in life, have left their mark upon us for good.

OUR FATHER.....

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It is enough, O God, that we should earnestly pray that Thy Word should be preached with clarity and with conviction. It is also necessary that we should pray that Thy Word would fall upon receptive minds and hearts. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

GOD'S FAVORITES

A man may keep his sanity as he faces life if he can be assured that as the future unfolds chapter by chapter, it could bring him upon some new-found joy. It's a salutary thing for a man to sit down and look back over his immediate past, if he can, and discover here and there some new-found joy that has brightened his day. For myself, my days these days are being brightened by a new-found joy which comes through an increasing deepened relationship with a four-year old youngster. Every now and then, when he has an expansive mood, there's a twinkle in his eye and he looks at me and he says, "You're my Number One."

You have no idea what this does to my ego -- until I discovered perhaps that he's saying the same thing to somebody else. I shan't take him too much to task, however, I shan't for the moment ever allow myself to believe that he's being less than honest -- he's too innocent for that. But rather I take myself to task: who am I to believe that I should be his only Number One? Why shouldn't I cherish for him that he should feel this way toward any number of people, that his heart would be big enough to feel kindly and graciously

toward them as well?

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But having said all of this, would you believe me if I were to tell you that down deep in the heart of every single one of us there is a desire to be somebody's Number One? to be somebody's favorite? to have somebody look upon us as they do not look upon any other person? Some of us go on living day by day just because we know this happens to be true, to be somebody's Number One.

As I stand before you now, I raise the question -- we who have just celebrated the birth of our nation: can we believe that we're God's Number One? There was a nation that once believed that -- the Children of Israel looked upon themselves as God's favorite. They kept telling them of that precious truth all of the years of their history. One leader after another stood in front of them and kept drilling it into them: "We're God's chosen people."

I turn the pages of the Old Testament and I'm led from Genesis to Malachi to discover the recurring theme: "God's Chosen Ones" . . . "God's Called Ones" -- -- God dealing with them as He did not deal with any other people on the face of the earth.

There's an interesting period in their history, when they're just about to enter the Promised Land. They are war-weary, and their battle-scarred leader has called this solemn assembly. All the tribes are gathered together. There just beyond them is the Promised Land, and their leader, who is not to set foot upon that soil, stands up and delivers a stirring address.

What does he do in that address? You can read it for yourself in the portion of that 8th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. He has only one thing

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that he seems to want to tell them, that they are God's Number One - - he does what the record itself reveals, God called them, God chose them, God raised up a leader for them, a Moses and then a Joshua. He brought them out of bondage, He engineered their safe passage through the Red Sea, He gave them the Ten Commandments, He gave them the promise of a land-of-lands. And all of these things He did not do for any other people. The Israelites were not the only people on the face of the earth. But they were the only ones who were called God's Chosen People. They were the only ones who got a Moses, and a Joshua. They were the only ones who got a Ten Commandments. They were the only ones who got a promised land. To all intents and purposes, it appears as though they're God's Number One.

Now as that leader stands before them and reminds them of all of this, it would be an excellent point at which to pronounce the benediction and send the people on their way with their flags flying and their heads held high, strutting away from the presence of the Lord....

...but Moses did not finish his address at that point. He went on. Having reminded them of God's favor, he had something else to say, and the text which serves as the basis for this meditation is the 19th verse of that 30th chapter of his wonderful address. Here are the words:

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"If you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish."

It could be that they were God's favorites, and quite parenthetically, I don't know that one ought to be overly exercised at that concept. God does choose certain people. There are certain periods in history when God chooses

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certain nations. Just as a carpenter or a craftsman or an artist may have in front of him certain tools and instruments, in order to accomplish a particular kind of work he deliberately chooses the thing that's going to be placed in his hand at that particular time. If a man has six sons, it may be by reason of capability and personality and temperament that he may deliberately choose one son as over against five to accomplish a particular mission that needs to be accomplished at that particular time. Of all the people on the face of the earth, I honestly believe that God chooses the Church as a particular instrument to accomplish a particular purpose for all the nations whom He holds in the hollow of His hand, for all peoples.

Dare we believe that God has chosen America for a particular role of responsibility at a particular time in the history of the nations of the world? If you won't misunderstand me, I will tell you that when I have traveled in other lands I have taken with me a profound sense of gratitude that I am an American. I hope it hasn't been false pride, and I hope it hasn't been arrogance. But when I think of certain things that we have been able to accomplish, scientifically, economically, even with our experiment in democracy, I have been profoundly grateful. I am fully aware of the fact that there are those in our day who tell us that our sun has set, that our glory is the glory of a nation that has been, that the best belongs only to the past.

I'm not to be numbered among those who say such things. I am to be numbered among those who with a historical perspective can see how God has used certain crises to accomplish some noble purpose by which other nations in the world might be blessed. The historian in me, and also the preacher, are coupled at times in a recognition of the fact that it can be said that here

and there, in no uncertain way, we have been a nation under God.

There are two things for which I remain profoundly grateful in my own personal life. One is my baptism which has brought me into the Family of God. And the second thing, that when that immigrant father of mine was heading for a brave new world, he remained perpetually unsatisfied until his dream brought him to the shadow of the Statue of Liberty.

But I also stand before you now as one being soberly cautioned that God shows no favoritism at the expense of justice, and compassion, and truth. So this may be a moment when we must examine ourselves all over again....

...are we exploiting the good earth which is ours?

...are we exploiting the dream of democracy...are we
abusing it?...are we misusing it?

These are questions that must be asked again and again by every generation.

...have we reached the point where we sit down and we look
upon our might and our power and say, "These things we
have done" - - and bow God out of the picture completely?

These are questions that must be asked.

God may reach for a particular people to use them for a particular purpose, but at the same time He is just as exacting of them as He is of all created creatures. He does not have one set of rules for those whom He uses and another set of rules for those whom He may not choose for a certain purpose or assignment.

For those of you who know my mind and spirit, you will not be surprised when I tell you now that I have deliberately chosen to conclude this sermon with words of Rudyard Kipling. It was a great and wonderful moment in England's

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history. It was her proud day. She was celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Never was there to have been a celebration quite like that celebration....

(...quite incidentally, do you know that we have a member of
this congregation who remembers Queen Victoria?.....)

...well, somebody commissioned Rudyard Kipling to write the significant words to mark that occasion. I want to quote now the closing stanza of his Recessional, and once they have been spoken there is no need for further comment.

"God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine;
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget - - lest we forget!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
July 5, 1970

O GOD OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, We give You thanks for this day, for this land whose citizenship we claim.

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O GOD, OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, We thank You that we have the freedom to worship You as our conscience directs us, we thank You that we have freedom to speak our minds without fear; we thank You for our liberty, the just laws and the good government that we enjoy. And O God, we thank You for all those who lived and died to win this freedom for us.

O GOD, We give You thanks for all that this land provides for us, the opportunities of education, for all that is done to help the sick and the poor and those who need jobs. O God, we ask you to bless those who rule and govern our country; bless the President and all his cabinet and all the members of the Senate and Congress, those in the Civil Service, those who serve cities, towns, counties and states, those who engage in any service that helps people.

O GOD, Grant that this country may have leaders who are themselves led by You, who are not men and women who are out for prestige but for service, and who set the good of community above the good of any class or party.

O GOD, help us to be good citizens of this land in this time. O God, help us to develop a sense of responsibility so that we may never be the kind of people who leave all work and service to others. While we think of our land we also pray for other lands. Help us to work and pray to help You to send freedom to lands where men are oppressed, food and help to lands where men are hungry and sick, to send the story of Jesus to lands where men have never heard of Him.

O GOD, Help us to be worthy of the heritage to which we have entered.
And O God, help us to pass it on an even finer thing to those who follow after.

OUR FATHER, WHO art in Heaven.....

ON MEETING PROBLEMS

Hush our hearts, quiet our minds,
make us reverent before You, O
God. Amen.

Boys and girls and our friends from the Sunday School department, we want you to know how happy we are that you can be here now. If I understand it correctly, it's about once a year that you're able to come like this, as your schedule is arranged. We want to thank not only you who have come, but also your teachers and your friends who are with you, as well as your parents if they should also be in the same seat with you.

Whatever you do, boys and girls, don't ever forget to thank God for your Sunday School teachers. As I stand here at the pulpit this morning as a preacher, I'm very, very certain that I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the fact that I had Sunday School teachers at your age. My Dad came over from the Old Country. He didn't know very much about the ways of the New World, he never had an education here in the States, so he couldn't read the Bible like even you read the Bible. And my mother wasn't a very well woman, and she never read much of the Bible to me, although both my dad and mother lived the truths of the Bible and set before us a very wonderful example. But when it came to learning the Bible stories, my Sunday School teachers were the ones who for the most part taught me those Sunday School lessons.

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And come to think of it, I don't know that I would ever have gotten to Sunday School if it hadn't been for a lady who lived nearby who saw the little Shaheen children, and she said they ought to be in Sunday School. So she asked my dad and my mother if she couldn't take us along to Sunday School. So you can see how happy I am whenever I think of Sunday School and those who teach.

Now since you have come, I'm going to set aside the sermon that I preached at 8:30 this morning, and I would like to talk especially to you. Naturally I hope you will listen, and I hope that all the people behind you will also listen while I talk to you.

Now what I want to talk to you about is what Pastor David read as the third Scripture lesson. Maybe you weren't aware of it, but when he was standing over there he read one lesson, then he read a second lesson, and then he read a third lesson. And the third lesson was a very wonderful story in the life of Jesus.

Now before I do anything else, I must tell you that when Jesus was here on earth He spent three years going around from town to town and telling people all about God. And people loved to have Him tell the story about God. You know, of course you do, they didn't have television in those days, and they didn't have radio, and whatever they learned about God they learned from somebody who came and told them about God. So Jesus went around from town to town.

And whenever He got to a town, the word spread very fast. Boys and girls would run down the street and they'd go into this house and they'd go into that house and they'd say, "Jesus is here -- we'd like to go hear Him tell the stories about God." And sometimes He'd work miracles, and they thought

maybe He'd work a miracle in their town.

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Well one time, boys and girls, when Jesus came there were so many people came out to hear Him -- not just the number of people who are here in Saint Luke Church right now, but twice as many -- more than ten times as many -- over four thousand people came. That's more than the number of people who lived in my home town, and I thought we had quite a number of people in my home town. And once even five thousand people came to hear Him. And the more He talked the more the people listened. and Then something happened that maybe as a boy or a girl, you can't understand how it happened, but they listened to Him so well that they forgot it was lunch time, and they forgot it was time to sit down and eat.

And then after they were there as long as they were, a lot of them had a great distance to go, a long, long way to go home. They didn't have bicycles, they didn't have automobiles, they didn't have trains, they didn't have jets, they didn't have buses.....so if they had to go they had to walk, or ride a donkey, or ride a camel. It would take them a long while to get home, and there weren't a lot of restaurant places along the road where you could stop and get something to eat. Whatever food they had would have to be given to them right then and there.

Now listen to me. Somebody came and said to Jesus, "What are we going to do? These people are hungry." They had a problem on their hands.

Now let's think a little bit about this business of problems, because that's really what this sermon is all about --- problems...problems... problems. The other night we had a terrible rain-storm, and a lot of people had problems, problems they didn't know they had, and the rain came in in

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places where they didn't think the rain would come. Even downstairs here in Saint Luke Church we had rain coming in at a certain place that has to be corrected, and Mr. Futrell as Chairman of the Property Committee, and Mr. Braun, who is up here in the choir, they're going to see to it now that that's going to be corrected because that's a problem that has to be taken care of.

Well, here was a problem. I suppose I could tell you that I've been in the ministry long enough to know that almost everybody I've ever known has some kind of a problem. Problems....problems....problems. And what do you do when you have a problem?

Well, the first thing you have to do when you have a problem is to know that you have it. There are some people who have problems and they refuse to admit that they have problems. Other people know they have a problem, but they'll never face up to the fact themselves that they have a problem. And this causes them a great deal of difficulty. Well the wonderful thing we can say about the story Pastor David told us, as he read it from the Bible, is right away they said, "We have a problem."

So....what do you do? Well, it doesn't help to just go around and nod your head and fold your hands and say, "Isn't that too bad!" When you have a problem you have to do something about it. Well, these people said, "We'll bring the problem to Jesus" - - just like you boys and girls are inclined to do. When you have a problem, what do you do? You run off to your mommy, you run off to your daddy, you run off to your brother, your sister, somebody who is older, and you say, "Help me." Well these people came to Jesus, and they said, "What are we going to do?"

And then something happened. Maybe you won't believe it, but Jesus

turned right to them and He said, "But what are you going to do about it?"

"Do you have any food? Is there anything that you have that you might be able to do to correct this problem yourself?"

...well, that's the second thing that you have to do when you have a problem. First, you have to be sure that you know that you have a problem. Then you begin and you say to yourself, what can I do about it? In stead of looking to somebody else to do something about it -- what can I do? And when they looked around -- do you remember how the story went -- there was a boy there....Robbie, there was a boy there, and his mommy had packed a lunch for him.

Everybody in the group said, "Why, that boy has a lunch"...and I suppose any one of you boys would look like those boys that were there.... ..their skin might be olive-skinned, a bit darker, with dark eyes, dark hair, but a boy just about your age, I'd like to think he was. And he had a lunch. And everybody looked at that boy, as much as to say, "Well, you've got some food. What are you going to do about it?"

And when Jesus looked at the boy, because Jesus is the way He is, the boy gave the food to Jesus, and then Jesus took the food and He said a prayer, and He blessed it, and then He gave it to some of the other people, and they took of it, and they kept passing it around....

...and I like to think that maybe there might have been another boy somewhere who had a lunch, and maybe there was a little girl had a lunch -- I don't know, but maybe, and she saw what was happening to the little boy's lunch over here, she gave her lunch....and everybody else got in this sharing spree and everybody said, "Let me give you some of mine.... ..let me give you some of mine!" That's what happens when Jesus takes over, because everybody then wants to share as the miracle was being worked.

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Now, suppose that little boy would have said, "I'm going to keep it all to myself. I don't care about the rest of you people."? Pastor David would never be reading for us this wonderful lesson that he read this morning. It would never have found itself in the Bible, and Jesus would never have been able to work that miracle. But the little boy was willing to give up what he had into the hands of Jesus. And that's the next thing that you have to say to yourself, "All right, I'll do what I can, but God, I want you to help me and I want you to show me."

Even God won't do anything about it until you and I begin to do something about it. And that's something that a lot of people have never learned. There are some people who when they have a problem think all you have to do is fold your hands and pray, and then God will take over right away. Well there are a number of things that God will never do as long as we can do them for ourselves. God will help us, and the good that we're going to get done because we're going to do something about it will be far better when God helps us. But there are some things that God will never do for us until we first begin to do something ourselves.

Well, boys and girls, this is the story. It's a great story of the Bible. It's the performance of the miracle. The people who came -- they were hungry, they had to be fed, and they all had something to eat because Jesus was able to take the little that the boy had and bless it, and pass it around.

I don't know whether you've discovered it yet, but you're going to have problems. And when you do have problems, talk it over with your mommy or your daddy or your brother or your sister. One of you boys came to me one time -- was it last Sunday? -- with a problem. He couldn't figure out some-

thing in the Bible. It didn't quite make sense to him, so he came to me. And then together we tried to find out how to answer the thing.

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Now, I want to tell you a story that I haven't read in the Bible, but it's the story that belongs to the spirit of the Bible. Once upon a time in a small village there was a man whose house burned down to the ground. I don't know whether it was hit by lightning or what caused the fire, but anyway it burned all the way down. And that meant everything that the boys and girls who lived in that house owned was lost - - their clothing, their furniture and their food.

Well in that small town somebody said something ought to be done, and somebody who belonged to a church council said, "Well, let's go down to the church and we'll have a prayer meeting, and we'll pray about it to find out what we ought to do." And all the church councilmen got there except one man who didn't show up.

And because church council people are very human beings, some of the men got rather mad and wondered why that church councilman didn't come. They didn't like it very well. And just as they were about to pray, there was a knock on the door of the room where they were meeting, and when the man opened the door, there at the door was a little boy and he had a little wagon, and his wagon was filled with a bag of flour, some potatoes, some canned vegetables and maybe some bread -- I don't know.....and the little boy said to the man who answered the door, "My daddy had some work to do and he couldn't come to your prayer meeting. But he sent this along so that the people who don't have any food, whose house burned down, might have something." Well, there was a man who realized that if he wanted God to hear his prayer he should do something right away, with what he had.

Well when you have a problem, ask God to help you, to open your eyes

to see what you can do about it, and then God will help you from that point on.

Let us pray: Dear God, some of us have lived long enough to know that life is just one problem after another, and you never made any of us big enough to handle the problems by ourselves, but you gave us a heart by which to feel certain things, and you gave us a pair of hands by which we can do certain things. Open our eyes, then, that we might see the way we can begin to meet the problem at hand; and then we want to thank you that above all else, that when it comes to the greatest of all of our problems, the problem of sin, that none of us can manage by himself, then when we turn to you you give us Jesus our Saviour, who does for us at that point what none of us could ever do. We want to thank you. Amen.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
July 12, 1970

O GOD, Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for all your goodnesses to
us.

We thank you for those who never lose their belief in us,
even when we disappoint them, even when we fail them and
let them down.

We thank you for those who are never disloyal to us, even
when we are disloyal to them.

We thank you for those who never cease to care for us, for
those who do things for us, even when we take them for
granted, even when we do not appreciate them, even when
we are ungrateful to them.

O God, we thank you for those who never lose their love
for us, even when we hurt them and wound them.

O God, above all, we thank you for Jesus. Bring us to
that love of yours whose patience has no end and whose
generosity has no limits. Help us to come a little nearer
to loving you as you first loved us. Through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

OUR FATHER.....

"Whatever You Shall Ask - "

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GOD of Truth and God of Love,
God who is the Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, make Thy
known to us ^{self}
, even now, as we
give attention to Thy Holy Word.
Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our
Lord. Amen.

I stand here at the sacred desk this morning after two weeks of spiritual refreshment amid the hills of home. It's been a kind of spiritual pilgrimage, not simply because one has been fortunate enough to go back into the community where he was reared and trained in the faith, and to find hither and yon memories that bring back noble influences which will forever hold a man's soul in good stead, but primarily because I took those two weeks to become almost cloister-like, to meditate, read, to reflect, to write. For there nestled in the hills of home is a little study shack where one can find his own rendezvous with God.

It's a quiet peaceful spot. There are no noises in the country. There are only sounds, sounds that give expression to God's creative hand -- the sound of a world getting awake in the morning, the sound of God putting His world to bed at night. So it was that occasionally at an early hour I went to that study shack....sometimes maybe until two o'clock in the morning, there in the Kluttzhaus, to rendezvous with God.

You see, it's in preparation for an assignment which I have to go this Fall to our Lutheran chaplains at three different places here in the country,

on the topic of The Privilege and the Power of Prayer. What I am going to say to you now for the next eighteen minutes constitutes an overflow of these two weeks of earnest reflection.

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I'm going to begin by telling you that I was caught quite short by the recognition of a verse of Scripture which I had read ever so often before, that came upon me with a tremendous impact. It's the result of a conversation which our Blessed Lord had with His disciple band the last night that He spent with them. Surely they were not aware of the fact that this was true, but He knew of course that this was the last time that He might ever spend with them in that particular manner.

For the most part they had spent three years together, three wonderful years in the companionship of Jesus Christ. That's no little thing, and on that last night He said to them something that must have come as quite a jolt. Let me read for you the way the Scripture has it -- it's recorded in the fourth Gospel, the 16th chapter, the 23rd and the 24th verses:

"Verily, verily, I say to you, whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you shall receive."

Now that's quite a jolt, to be told that you've had the opportunity for three years to have something good poured into your life, and you just never took advantage of it.

I suppose more than one person has gone back to the school-house where he was taught - I hope this kind of thing still continues. And when he goes back years after his graduation, he might say to himself, these were the good days when such-and-such was offered to me -- if only I had taken more advan-

tage of it!

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No trip for me back to the hills of home would be complete without either going in or going by the church where I was baptized, confirmed in the faith. And as I tarry there in the attitude of reverence and respect, I think of those good and noble souls whom God raised up to touch my life at critical points. And as God gives me memory, and also a sense of responsibility, I take my soul to task for not having taken more advantage of the good that was poured into my life by them.

Occasionally there are people who come back to this congregation, a member who had been affiliated with this parish in other years. Occasionally they may say, in such the same manner, "If only we had taken fuller advantage of what was offered here!" So Jesus Christ is saying to His disciples, "You have had your chance, but you've never really taken full advantage of it."

In these two weeks as I have wrestled with the tremendous subject of prayer, I am convinced as never before that the greatest privilege which God allows man is to be able to pray. When God's creative hand was at work, He simply didn't think of us, you know He didn't, He thought of the whole animal kingdom. When He created the animals, He created them that they might respond to life instinctively. We have this in common with animals.

Man also reacts instinctively. But there's a difference in the way man reacts instinctively because man is made to be different than the beasts -- he can control his instincts, and he can direct them to noble interests and concerns.

I am also convinced as never before that men pray instinctively. Come wind or weather, life is such that it will force a man to his knees. Come

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wind or weather, this world is not conducive to the creation of atheists. This world is conducive to making believers. I am also of the firm opinion that any man, anywhere, at some time or another, will recognize that over and above and beyond him there is something or someone, whose name he may not know, yet because of the pressure and the tension of life he will cry out, if nothing more than a cry: "Help! - - Save!" When that cry is made, a man is praying. He's recognizing his dependent nature.

Now there are many different kinds of prayer. Some are of a very low level, some are of a very high level. Christians are not the only people who pray. But what constitutes the difference in a Christian's prayer? Well, that's one question that I might propose that we consider at some other time.

But let's get back to the text, in which Jesus Christ says, "This is your privilege to ask, if you ask anything in my name, you will get it." Can you really take that at face value? There isn't a single person among us this morning who cannot in all honesty say, "I have prayed, and did not get it." I recall certain moments in my own life, with all the ardor of my soul I asked God earnestly to give, to answer my prayer, and He did not. What, now, will you do with this text?

You ought not to forget that Mark Twain has done a great deal of good for us. He, perhaps more than any other person, taught America how to laugh at itself and to laugh with one another. And on occasion his good humor is unusually perceptive, and because I believe this to be true, I want you to listen now to the quotation from one of your favorite characters of his, if I read your mind aright, the Mississippi river lad, Huckleberry Finn. He

of all people had a problem with prayer -- this business of being told you can ask. Listen now while I read the quotation for you --

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"Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warden't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By and by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way. I set down one time back in the woods, and had a long think about it. I says te myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Wynn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuff-box that was stolen? Why can't Miss Watson fatten up? No, says I to myself, there ain't nothing to it."

Quite honestly now, maybe you've never had a Miss Watson in your life to talk to you the way she talked to Huckleberry Finn. But you have had preachers, haven't you? And you've had preachers who have admonished you to pray, just like I do, and to pray fervently, and to echo something of the voice of Jesus Christ that you should ask for anything in His name and that you will get it.....just like Huckleberry Finn, on occasion you have come to the conclusion that maybe there isn't anything to it. Well, more

than ever I believe that there is something to it, but having said that, how can I fortify you even as I fortify myself?

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With all the ardor of my soul I give high and proper recognition to the word of Jesus Christ: "If ye ask anything in my name, believing, you will receive it." But these are the conditions under which such faith has to operate:

First, you've got to recognize that there are some things that God will never give, just because they are not in keeping with His nature and with His character. God can never be less than God. That means He will never be less than good, He will never be less than kind, He'll never be less than truthful, He'll never be less than compassionate. Even that ejaculation in which a man, thinking or unwittingly, will ask God to damn somebody, is a prayer that God never answers, because it's not the nature of God, by snapping His finger, to consign somebody to hell, and particularly just because you happen to ask Him.

Well maybe you're not an extremist in that regard, but you may have your moments in which you may ask God to do something that it's absolutely contrary to His nature. God says, whenever you ask for anything, you ask for it in my name, which is in the name and the spirit and the purpose of Jesus Christ. And you know what His purpose in life was.

There are some things that God will never give just because you and I happen to ask them for ourselves and for ourselves alone. I am not so certain that there's anything in the great reservoir to which God alone has the key which has a label on it bearing your name and your name alone. Whatever God sees fit to give He gives because

He wants to give to everybody. And God just won't hear my prayer if it's for me and for myself alone.

In some of my readings I have been delighted to come upon some of the rabbinic sayings of the ancient Jew. Here's one for you: it was the admission that there were certain prayers that the God of Israel would never hear and never answer. One such prayer was the Way-farer's prayer. Now, way-farer is the name for the modern-day tourist, or the modern-day traveler, who had to take a journey from one point to another and could make the best possible time under desirable weather conditions. And so the way-farer's prayer was always a prayer for good weather, as he thought of himself...

...he never so much as stopped to think as to whether
or not the farmer needed rain for his fields...

...he never so much as stopped to think as to whether
or not the wells were running dry for the people who
lived in the village....

His only thought was that he had to get somewhere, and he wanted the sun from heaven to shine upon him and him alone. When you and I pray, we do well to recognize the fact at once that a prayer that God will never hear and answer is a prayer that arises from our hearts solely for selfish purposes.

So while I must tell you that there are some prayers that will not be answered, even though Jesus Christ says, ask and you will get, as long as you ask in my name - - I am also happy to tell you that, just as I have been able to say that there are some prayers that I have made that God has never heard and answered.....so I can also tell you that there are

certain prayers that I have made and God has responded. The only explanation that I can give for certain good has been that at a specific time the heavens were opened, God smiled graciously and said, "Take" - and the cup began to overflow. This I must certainly believe.

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Now if you were to ask me why sometimes the prayer is answered one way as over against another way, I cannot satisfy your curiosity at that point, other than what I have already told you, except to say that there may be moments when I must stand before God completely mystified for the simple reason that God happens to be God and I happen to be man, and at this particular moment in my life it's not within my capability to understand why God does what He does, or why God doesn't do what I think He ought to do. Suffice now to say that the great privilege for the Christian is being able to pray.

Before it's too late in your life, my friend, take advantage of the privilege -- draw heavily upon the store-house of His mercy and of His love and of His truth and of His goodness. It's there for the asking. Fine as I believe this congregation to be, God himself knows how its mind and spirit and purpose could be transformed to even far greater glory than some of us like to believe exist -- if only day by day an increasing host among us would pray, "God, channel through me -- God, channel through my congregation your love, your truth, your goodness, your wisdom."

Lest I forget, the thing that God has most of -- now be very patient with me with this awkward expression -- the thing that God has most of is Himself, and the thing that God wants most to give is Himself. And that's about the last thing that some of us ever ask God to give us.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

August 9, 1970

"TODAY - WHERE YOU ARE"

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WE HAVE so little time, O God. to do the sort of thing that we want to do now, give undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. Bless not only him who stands at the desk as Your servant, but may Your Holy Spirit so rule the minds and the hearts of those who listen that they might become receptive to Thy truth. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

Again I can't quite ignore the fact that we have in the congregation our younger friends, and by your leave I'd be more than willing to adjust what I plan to say pretty much to a level of their understanding. It's not a very easy thing to do and I ask for your prayers in this behalf.

Now first the text for the sermon. It's from the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day."

Danny, would you believe it, once upon a time Jesus was your age, and when I say Danny I could say Jimmy, I could say Scott, I could name any one of you boys, or you girls as well - - once upon a time Jesus was the very age that you are right now, and He grew up in a town by the name of Nazareth.

His father and his mother, Joseph and Mary, cared for Him. Joseph, as you know, was a carpenter, and he had his carpenter's shop. And among the very great joys of my life was to be able to go to Nazareth and walk the

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streets of Nazareth. And one of the first things that I wanted to see in Nazareth was the carpenter's shop....and I stood outside the door of a carpenter's shop and I tried to picture how once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a dark-haired, dark-eyed boy, who walked around almost ankle-deep in shavings - - who could almost see over, just about that much, the top of the carpenter bench where the wooden vise was, where those carpenter tools were.

And as He became a bit older, He learned how to be a carpenter, and there were days when there were deliveries that had to be made....

...and I can picture Joseph saying to Jesus now: "Today take this wooden sill -- you can carry it on your shoulder, it's not too heavy -- and at the edge of the town lives Isaac. You tell him we've done the best job that we could possibly do. Look, Jesus, run your hand over that wooden sill and see how smooth and clean and sturdy it is! Take it to him - - "

...and then as He became much older, He was able to take the yoke for the oxen. That was a little bit more difficult to handle, but He was able to do it, and He delivered the yoke....

...He not only delivered the things but He helped to smoothe them and to make them and to cut them....

He grew up. And then one day He left town. He was away for quite a while.

He was a young man now, and some of the people wondered what had happened to Him, where He was going and what He was doing, and all kinds of re-

ports came back. Small towns have a way of getting all kinds of reports, and some people said this about Him and other people said that about Him. But quite frequently they said that He was going to be a preacher. And some folks wondered if He'd ever come back to Nazareth.

Well one night, there was a great deal of excitement in Nazareth because the word went around that Jesus, the carpenter's son, had come back to his home town. People said, where is He? And they came back with a very wonderful answer. They said, "Why, He's down at church." -- that's about as good a thing as I can hear said about a person -- "He's down at church."

Because it's time for church to begin, and you remember He always went to church when He was a boy, and when He lived here in Nazareth -- so all the people ran down to church, I suppose, and they couldn't get in....some had to stand on the outside. And I think I can hear one man saying, "Why, there He is! He's about the fourth one from the front over on the left-hand side. I can recognize Him from the back." And they stood there and the service went on...

...not like our service. It was a different kind of a service, and very informal. And there was one man in charge, maybe like the Vice-President of the Church Council or the Superintendent of the Sunday School, the Chief Ruler of the Synagogue....

And as the service would go on from one part to another, they would arrive at the place where the lessons should be read, the passage from the Bible. And the man who was in charge of the service said something like this, I think: "We're delighted to have here for the service one of our home-

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town boys, and I think we ought to honor Him by asking Him to read the Scriptures. You all remember Him, Joseph-the-carpenter's son."

So Jesus got up and went over to the place where the Scriptures were kept - - not in a book like this, but you'll learn about it in Sunday School if you haven't already - - they were kept in scrolls. And He went over and one was given to Him and He unrolled it and He found the place where it was written....

...now wouldn't you like to know what He read from the Bible? Well I'm in a position to tell you. If you listen carefully I'll read it for you. Here we are:

"And He came to Nazareth (you heard me read this verse for you just a little while ago)

- - where he had been brought up, and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue when the sabbath day, and he stood up for to read; and there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he opened the book

(or unrolled the scroll)

he found the place where it was written. "

...and this is what He read from the Bible:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

And then He closed the book, rolled the scrolls back, He gave it again to the person in charge, and He sat down! And at that moment everybody looked, because this meant something.

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In those days a person stood up to read, but if he wanted to preach, he'd sit down -- like if I wanted to preach right now, instead of standing here, I'd bring a chair and I'd sit down, and as soon as I would sit down the whole congregation would say, now he's going to tell us something about what he read. That's exactly what Jesus did.

What He said startled the congregation. He said, "Today I want to tell you that everything that I read is going to be fulfilled."

Now what does that mean? Well, let's take a look at it. In that passage of Scripture Jesus was talking about all the good things that ought to be done in this world to get the world right. The world is in a mess, it was in a mess in the day of Jesus. There were poor people, there were blind people, there were people in prison, there were all the so-called disadvantaged people, who didn't have nearly as much as they ought to have... ..hungry people, poor people, people discriminated against, people who had to have people help them.....and Jesus said, "Today I want you to know this scripture is being fulfilled -- "

...and when He said that He was saying, "Today I'm going to do something about it -- I am going to let this scripture become alive in Myself."

Well now, this is a funny thing -- it shocked them because here was somebody who was going to take God seriously, and do exactly what God wanted done today and in that time!

Boys and girls, I don't like to tell you this but I have to tell it to you, there are any number of people who can think about God as long as God is far, far away. There are any number of people who want the preacher to talk about the God who lived in the day of the prophets, in the day of

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Jesus, two thousand years ago, and to tell all about the things that God did then and there. But they don't want the preacher to talk about the things that God wants done today. It's alright for the people then and there to have done what God wanted, but let's not talk about His demands on us today!

There are some people who like to see Jesus Christ painted into pretty pictures, imprisoned, I say, in stained glass windows, because Jesus isn't going to come down out of that stained glass window and talk to us.

There are some people who like to have Jesus Christ imprisoned in wood carvings, beautiful and necessary as this may be to help in our worship experience, but a figure that's carved into wood isn't going to trouble us very much.....

...this was the day when Jesus-the-carpenter's-son stood up and He said, "Today I'm going to do something about it and I'm going to do something about it in my home town."

I know any number of people who think that the only way to be a Christian would be if your situation was improved and you lived somewhere else. I've lived long enough to believe that if you can't be a Christian where you are, you can't very easily be a Christian somewhere else.

I'm going to tell you a story. I'm not going to tell it to you because I want you to think it's a funny story -- oh, it has humor in it alright, but it has a very important point: if you've ever driven out in the country you know how easy it is to become lost. It's quite difficult to find Your way in the country, with the winding roads and the separated fields and

the valleys.....

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Well one time there was a man who wanted to get to a certain farmer's house, and so he said to a man along the road, "How do I get to Farmer Jones' house?" And the man said, "Well, you go down here for two miles, then you turn to the right, then you come to a school-house and you turn to the left, then you cross the bridge, and then very obliquely you go for a quarter of a mile and, well" he said, "If I wanted to get there I wouldn't start from here!"

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But the point of the problem is, that's where he happened to be, and the only point from which he could start was the place where he was!

Nazareth was the home town of Jesus, and He made up His mind He was going to put into practice everything that God wanted Him to put into practice, in His home town.

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God always wants us to begin where we are, with what we have.

The people didn't like it. They tried to get rid of Him, because many people want a God who is somewhere else, because when He comes near to us He can be very demanding. And He wants us to measure up, to be everything that the world needs, right now.

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Boys and girls, try to remember that all the time Jesus was growing up He was being taught to do what God wanted Him to do, and then when He became a man He was so well trained and so convinced that He said, "Alright, I'll do it, and I'll begin to do it now."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
August 9, 1970

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SO OUR time together is almost up, Heavenly Father, and we'd like to thank You that Your Holy Spirit has brought us together. It could be that a certain number of us may be strangers to one another, but we know in our hearts that we're not a stranger to You.

HEAVENLY FATHER, when we came here we brought along with us our limitations, our failures, our fears and our frustrations. Some of us are far more aware of these than what other people think we are. Here in the shadow of this Throne of Grace, a reminder of Your unending love for us, we're grateful for the fact that you deal patiently with us. We'd like You to send us back into the world now, renewed and restored by Your Grace, a little more loving, a little more patient, a little more like Your Son, Heavenly Father. This is our earnest, our noble intention.

HEAVENLY FATHER, we pray for Thy Church throughout the world and especially for those who labor in difficult places.

We pray for those who work for peace. May the fruits of their efforts come speedily. If not, make us to wait patiently and not give up hope.

NOW give to each of us the blessing that he needs most before he goes from this place. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord.

OUR FATHER

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
August 23, 1970

The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity

"WHAT THE SERMON'S ALL ABOUT"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Ordinarily, as some of you know, the sermons to be preached from the sacred desk by your Pastor are planned approximately a year in advance. Before he takes a summer vacation, the general theme and the texts of the sermons to be preached from September to June are put down on paper. Today's sermon, however, is something of an exception. It was not on the planned schedule, and in reality it is the outgrowth of a conversation which was conducted in the office of the Senior Pastor one day this past week. You will be interested in this bit of background.

On occasion, a visitor came to worship with us. He was here several weeks ago, presumably for the last time in a number of years. He is a Lutheran clergyman. For a decade now he's been involved in the ministry of the church in a general field, that is, working with the Board of American Missions, it's been his responsibility to concentrate rather heavily in one of the areas of our nation that's having a population explosion, in a way, perhaps, that other sections are not affected. And his responsibility has been to help get new mission congregations organized...where they should be best located...where, perhaps, under God's guidance through the Holy Spirit, the right man could be chosen to lead the young congregation in its incipient years. And then an equal responsibility has been his

meeting with church councils, as they discuss the kind of thing they want to be in God's name in the area where they find themselves.

Now he's relinquishing his post and he's going to begin, two weeks from today, a pastorate in one of our fine congregations in Pennsylvania. He asked that he might come and just sit down and talk, to go over some of the phases of the work of the Lord as we are privileged to know it in this congregation. He mentioned, in a salutary way, the worship life of the parish as he had participated in this phase of our life as a visitor.

Then he said, "I know something of your program. Will you please tell me what you're trying to accomplish? I see some evidence of it . . . "

So together we talked about various aspects of the Lord's work as we're trying to share it in this congregation - - - a ministry to people of all ages, trying to touch them significantly, at whatever may be their period and their station in life. So we talked about what you mean to the Kingdom of God as a member of this parish, as it's being projected through the spirit of the congregation, and the program.

Then before he left, he implied that his work didn't allow him to do too much preaching, and he said, "What do you have to say to me about the preaching ministry?" I think you ought to hear my answer.

I said that if I were beginning my ministry all over again, I would place far greater importance upon the preaching ministry, and I am hoping that that's being done now, in the time that God allows me with you -- not to be shunted aside, but to be given a primacy that rightfully belongs to it.

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For it's no small thing when a people gather together and will, to all intents and purposes, remain attentive for perchance twenty minutes while one person stands up with the Good Book in front of him and serves as God's communicator of that truth. For in the congregation there are those who have a variety of needs, and those needs can all be met through spiritual growth and development as God's Word is interpreted and God's Word for our day communicated.

I've had some lingering thoughts in my mind after our conversation was concluded, hence this sermon today, that you may rightfully regard it as a kind of self-analysis on my part - - - how do I understand what God has allowed me to do in your midst?

My friend, Alex Dow, for whom I have unusually high regard, might tell you that a sermon in itself is a kind of art form, a bit of poetry, the painting of a verbal picture, the carving of a thought. If that should be true, then some of you may be in need as I have been in need when I have been with artists and sculptors and painters or musicians, artists of any expression.....and I've known a great deal of benefit when I have been able to see what they've been trying to do through their eyes. Some of us are a bit dull in this regard, and we find it a very helpful thing for the artist sometime to tell us just what it is that he was trying to achieve in what he's put on canvas. It's a salutary thing to see art through the eyes of the artist.

If you don't mind, then, don't misunderstand me, I'd like you to see through the eyes of this preacher what he thinks his preaching should be about, and what, by the grace of God, he's been trying to do as he stands

at this sacred desk Sunday after Sunday. And if, once I have concluded, you could say to yourself, this is what I believe he's been doing, and this is what it's meant to me - - then you could not have spoken to me any word that would have been more helpful, and surely encouraging.

To begin with, I honestly believe that every sermon that I've tried to preach should give you some evidence of the reality of God. There should never be any doubt in your mind that when you happen to hear this preacher preach, as far as the ^{existence of God} ~~evidence-of-God~~ is concerned, at the end of every sermon that I try to preach you ought to be able to say, "There's a preacher who believes that God is."

Betty Metzger, a religious columnist for the Washington Post, attended quite recently a rather unusual conference down in Little Switzerland, North Carolina. The convocation-of-sorts was a gathering of Jewish people who wanted to talk about religious experience and the fact of God. So they had especially chosen some distinguished rabbis of different types of persuasion, religiously speaking.

And somewhere in her article she cites the person who said, when the conference was over, something like this: "I traveled hundreds of miles to get here, at some expense of time and money, only to have a rabbi tell me, in essence, that he no longer believes in God, at least not in the traditional concept of God as some of us have known Him." From what I have read, and from what I have heard in conversation with some of my colleagues in the ministry, this could also happen in some of the pulpits of our land, that once the congregation has listened, there is no loud, clear ringing of the note of the reality of the existence of God.

Let there be no doubt in your mind as to what my purpose is in this regard, but every sermon that I preach, I hope, would make you increasingly aware of the fact that God is.

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The second thing that I hope would be characteristic of the preaching that I've tried to share with you, and I hope can go on sharing, that you and I should come to an awareness of the existence of God, that we should also appreciate the fact that God knows that we exist. It is never enough for a preacher to say that God exists. The Christian Gospel also strikes the note clearly that ours is a God in Heaven above who is fully aware of the fact that we exist, that we have needs, that He is a God whose hand outstretched provides for our needs. I hope that that has come through loudly and clearly too, to the end that when you offer your prayers at night there should be no doubt whatsoever in your mind that God is paying attention to you, that God loves you, that God cares for you.

This is one of the distinctive characteristics of the Christian Gospel, that God can be perfectly understood through Jesus Christ, that in Jesus Christ all the fullness of God has been pleased to dwell, that in Jesus Christ there is a concern for every single human being -- that means you.

But I would also hope that whatever preaching that you hear from this sacred desk through the soul of this preacher, would also be made known to you, and very plainly so, that while God is and that God knows that you are, God also knows that you and I are not the only people in the world...

...that God is fully aware of other people as well...

...that we may have the glorious privilege of being found within the church. Was it Bishop Aulein or Nygren? -- who said it so magnificently, that all of us are in the hand of God, whether with our belief or with our unbelief.

And I would earnestly hope and pray that in every sermon there's been some overtone of the fact that while we are God's children, we are not God's only children. God loves the world.

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I would hope that you would discover in every sermon that's being preached something of the note that enables us to believe that God works uniquely through His Church, and that there are certain things that God will allow us to do that He may not assign to other people, and that if the Church should fail, then God's hand is being shortened and His lips are being silenced, in a way that they may not otherwise be silenced or shortened.

I would hope that in every sermon that's been preached there has been the recognition of an attempt, to use a phrase that by this time some of you may quite tire from -- an attempt to lift our eyes beyond our own horizon. ...and that while you and I may cherish the thought that we can be kept secure in God's love, God keeps us secure in His love only that we might be empowered to become the channels of His blessing in other people's lives, whether those people live five miles away, a half mile away, five minutes away, or a half a world away.

I could not help but be impressed in the reading of the Gospel for the day, when a young man came inquiring about how he could be sure of eternal life, a continual evidence of God's favor (that's a free translation). Jesus Christ told him about a man who was able to meet the need of somebody else. And when the question was put: Who might this man be? Jesus Christ gave him to understand, that man most certainly would be anyone nearest at hand ...and that's the point at which he ought to begin.

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There are any number of people that I've come to know -- not that I would completely discredit them, don't you dare misunderstand me -- who can get terribly excited about God's children five thousand miles away who happen to be in need....but who wouldn't possibly get excited at all about somebody very much in need a mile away, or -- brace yourself -- somebody very much in need within the confines of their own family circle. Any single one of us could do a day's work for the Lord by trying to witness effectively for Christ with those nearest at hand. Not that we would end there, but that we might learn to begin there.

In certain elements of my counseling ministry with people I am absolutely amazed at the way some of us short-change those who are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood, who are crying out for patience, and understanding, and compassion, let alone some measure of integrity and honesty. I would hope that somewhere in my preaching this sense of holy obligation has been aroused within you.

And then of course, when it's all said and done, I would hope there has always been present the element that, thanks be to Jesus Christ, every single one of us can have an encounter with God, and that there is no meaningful religious experience that does not enter into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. There can be no Christian Gospel without the encounter of an individual with Christ. As John Wesley went up and down England at the time in which he lived, rising early in the morning and going tirelessly until nightfall, writing in his diary, no matter where he had been and what he had done: "I gave them Christ! I gave them Christ! I gave them Christ!" -- this is what I would hope might be the word

that you could put down in the diary of your soul. For there is none other name under Heaven wherby we can be saved.

Now if you want to know what my preaching is all about as far as I'm concerned, these have been my motivational forces under God. Phillips Brooks once gave a classic definition for a sermon. I don't know that it's ever been improved upon. For those students of the Scriptures we recognize at once that they bring a certain measure of appreciation for what he says. Phillips Brooks said: "A sermon is the communication of truth through personality."

....Sunday by Sunday, in a certain sense, I have been sharing with you my own personal encounter with God through Christ.

Now, what could have been the text, the words of the Apostle Paul, the first verse of the fifteenth chapter of his first letter to the Christians who happened to live at Corinth:

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received and wherein you stand."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer offered by Pastor Raymond Shaheen
August 23, 1970

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O GOD, a good portion of the day is almost over. We want to thank you for what we have been able to do so far. We have come here. We have laid bare our soul, each in his own way, to you. We have been lifted up with the ministry of praise, we have been confronted by the truth of the sacred writings. We have tarried here now in the shadow of the cross.

Now, very shortly, we will be turning our back upon this altar and going out in the world, a world that so desperately needs Your kind of love, surely Your kind of truth. Help us to understand that if the world is going to know of God's love and truth, it will have to come through His agents. To that end empower us now that we may not fail You, this day or this week.

DEAR GOD, Watch over all for whom we have special concern, wherever they may be, and be with Thy Holy Church throughout the world. Hear again our prayer for peace, and be with those who work earnestly for the things that make for peace.

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord.

OUR FATHER.....

"THE GOSPEL OF OPTIMISM"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

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I caught a glimpse of her the other day, and only out of the corner of my eye at that. Nonetheless, the image was fairly sharp and the impression remains. Now that I think of it, I'm glad that it was as inadvertant as it was, because it could have been that an eyeball-to-eyeball encounter would have caused her a great deal of embarrassment.

Now, chances are she'll not recognize herself in these remarks, should she be present here this morning. I really wouldn't want her to, because I'd be the last person in the world to add to her humiliation. You see, she was a teenager, and the impression that remains lingering in my eye is that she was so sad-faced - - - as though the whole world had fallen upon her shoulders and she found the burden quite inescapable and too heavy to carry....as though she wasn't at all happy with what she had to face. Only a teenager....sad-faced.

Quite frankly, this is one of the things that troubles me most when I think of the younger generation. I have been able to swing with some of the excesses by this time, excesses in their behavior that I don't quite understand and don't quite appreciate. I speak honestly, yet not without live -- but I presume the one thing that I find most difficult to understand is why they should be so unhappy, why youth should go around sad-faced.

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I think it makes sense to me that this should happen to one who reaches the plateau years of life, where life begins to level off, where there are no more promotions lining the horizon, where perhaps one has achieved, and the only thing that lies ahead now may be the leveling off and then the downward slope of things, and where one has been shoved around enough in life, by the time he's forty years of age, that he might begin to lose faith in some people and in some things....

...I can understand the sad lines in the face of those who are forty years of age....if that should be their lot...
...but why youth should be sad-faced?

Some eight months ago I read these words as I was contemplating the beginning of 1970. Let me read them for you precisely, because I fear that they could be a justified commentary of our generation:

"This is an age when the young lose heart and the old feel betrayed; when cynicism pervades the land, and hope is at a low ebb. Now there you have it, I fear, an expression made all too clear. Could it be indeed that we have all become a generation who could give one big sob and lament so loud that the world would constitute our echo: 'everything -- everything is falling apart!'"

Well, let me say at once, you shouldn't have to come to church just to have a preacher stand at a sacred desk and bring to your attention the plight and the misery of the world. It's a poor excuse of a preacher if that's all

he has to offer you when you come on Sunday, simply a grim recital, a sad reading of the world as he sees it. But to the contrary, it becomes the messenger of God to stand up and to bring to your attention, perchance, the plight of the world - - - and then to enable you through faith to see it in proper perspective and know how to handle it.

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I hang my head in shame when I realize there have been times when I've come to this sacred desk when I have not been the optimist that a Christian ought to be. Maybe by this time I've self-classified myself as a "brooding optimist" - - - but an optimist I would be. For it doesn't become any Christian to be a pessimist. It just doesn't!

So why don't you pray for me that as God's messenger in your midst, again and again when I come to this place, I may be able to point out for you how you^f through faith may get the proper perspective on a world that is miserable....and if God were not the God that He is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He might perchance be walking around (if one may use the figure of speech) with nothing but a sad face. For we have reason to believe that the world is not pleasing to God. Surely you have reason to believe that it's not pleasing to you.

Some day, if God ever allows me the good fortune to return across the waters, when I go that time to England I shall not keep high on my list of priorities a visit to the storied cathedrals....as much as simply walking within them can bring a boon to my spirit....for as long as we live man will always need cathedrals in his world, and there must always be the

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spires of the spirit that enoble the soul of man. This time I think high on my list I'd like to visit a chapel, in Leistershire, England, and if you were going with me as a tourist, with your camera slung over your shoulder, you would readily understand why we'd tarry long enough to photograph the tablet that's on the wall of that church. It bears a classic inscription, reminding all who would come that way that that church was built in the mid-17th century, at a very difficult time in the history of England. Now here are the words on that tablet:

"In the yeare 1653
When all thinges sacred were
Throughout ye nation
Either demolisht or profaned
Sir Robert Shirley, Barronet
Founded this church:
Whose singular praise it is
To have done the best things
in ye worst times
And
Hoped them in the most calamitous."

There was a Christian. There was a man I would salute.

When you read the pages of the New Testament you are constantly confronted by that man Paul, the man of the profound religious experience, the man who remains as Exhibit A in the conversion experience of the Church. It's in his 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, that when you come to the 24th verse, that you'll read these words that serve as the basis for this meditation today:

"For we are saved by hope."

Now you can't possibly appreciate that text unless you realize the

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words that surround it. For the Apostle Paul, thinking of the day in which he lived, comes out with a very peculiar expression, and you've got to stick with it long enough -- it may take a little bit of effort, but it's worth it -- to have its real meaning dawn upon you. He says something about the "whole creation groans and knows travail." What he's really saying is that from the very beginning of time there has been this fluidity, there has been this flux, there has been turmoil, there has been unrest, there has been unsettlement. Says the Apostle Paul, who had a right to speak: "It's always been this way."

Now this is our problem, you see. Some of us have lived long enough that whenever we think of the past we think only of the past in idyllic terms. We succumb too easily to nostalgia, and say, "They were the good old days." We look upon life, as we view the past, with a tinged lens, rose-colored at that. Time has a way of allowing us to do this.

But any student of history knows that there has never been for any length of time a so-called period of calm and tranquillity. There has always been the seething, the surging and the unrest. It's the very nature of creation itself to be a becoming process, something that has not quite achieved but is forever about it. So the Apostle Paul viewed the day in which he lived, the unsettlement and the unrest and the surging, seething series of events that vexed his soul and vexed the soul of all the Christians.

It was no easy day in which to live. In fact, would you believe me, that as far as the Christian was concerned, there is never an ideal time in which to live as a Christian, where one has optimum conditions, where the world is just waiting to receive, with bated breath, the good news. It's

never been an easy day in which to love, or to live. It's always a struggle -- the whole creation groans -- it's always been like that!

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I remember as a student, with even that naive mind of mine, that I took a President of the United States to task as I read his words -- Warren Gamaliel Harding, the President who came in after World War I -- and his key word for America was, "Now let's get back to normalcy." What is normal? Surely those of us who are caught up with today's civilization cannot characterize it as being normal. Having gone through World War II I did not find it an easy thing to listen to the words of my friend, Dr. Paul C. Eaple, the man who epitomizes more than anybody else in the Lutheran Church the outstretched arm of Christ through Lutheran World Relief, when he told me not long after World War II that he did not expect to see, in the rest of his lifetime, any semblence of peace! Here I thought that's why we ended World War II.

If this can be said of the world when one views it in that regard, it can be said pretty well of all of life. It's groaning, it's troubled.

But now will you go on to the rest of that verse -- "in travail." That means as a woman about to give birth to a child. Now it takes a bit of doing to believe that, doesn't it? One may be forced by the facts of life to admit that this is not an easy day, that it is an upset world. But to believe that it's an emerging world that's bringing good! -- that whatever new that comes out of it is going to be something that the world needs? The Apostle Paul believed that, and he said herein lies our hope, that the crea-

tive hand of God has not been stopped, and that something is emerging for good.

Well, because I believe that to be true, I hope you'll never brand me as a preacher who comes to the sacred desk and laments about what the world has come to. But rather I would be the man who would come to this sacred desk reminding you of what is coming to the world! We just can't look in the past, then, and believe that God's hand is stayed, that whatever good that we've ever had to know has already happened. The theology that the Church must master all over again is the theology of hope. Says the Apostle Paul, "This is what we're saved by."

Now my friend, whatever your plight in life may be, I beg you, I implore you to ask God to allow you to believe that, with Him, the best is yet to happen...that God is good....and that goodness is always being created anew. Now that means, in a very uncomfortable sense for many of us, that we cannot become ostrichlike and run away from a troubled world, but rather as one wise man said, when the difficult day would come, he'd ask for eyes that were good enough and strong enough to discern the direction in which God would be moving, and then to follow after Him.

And that's precisely what we must do today: ask God to give us the wisdom by which we can understand the way in which He is operative in this troublesome world, and then to ally ourselves with Him and with His holy cause. You don't find it a very welcome thought? Well then, let me ask you, what option do you have? You want to imprison God in the past? -- freeze His hand in a day that is no more? Do you want to sit down and simply wait

for Doomsday to come?

I am haunted by the words of our Saviour spoken to a group of disciples the last night that He spent with them....

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, when he blessed it he

broke it and he gave it to them, saying, Take, eat . . "

....in which He gave Himself -- the totality of Christ -- God's gracious gesture in a future expressed on the world's darkest night.

God has not given up hope for His world. Nor dare we. I dare you to allow the Holy Spirit to put a light back into your eyes and to walk with a spring in your step -- characteristic of the soul that believes in the ongoing process of God, even in the world that might not quite reveal it.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
August 30, 1970

WE HAVE Received so much, O God, so many blessings that we have received from Your hand. And we give you thanks that we can come together as Your people in this place, to offer our gratitude expressed in tokens now placed before Your altar.

O GOD, use them in Your service, that through this church they may be an extension of Your love into the world.

O GOD, our Heavenly Father, we ask You today to bless our church, to bless Your congregation, for there is so much for which we have to thank You, for the fellowship that we enjoy, for the friendships that we have made, for all the togetherness of this place, we give You thanks, O God.

We thank you for all the teachings we have received, for the Sacraments through which Your grace comes to us, for the guidance for life and for all that we find here to keep us in the right way, that throughout the years You have kept Your promise that where Your people are, You are in the midst of them.

O GOD, Our Heavenly Father, save us from the things which would spoil our fellowship, from magnifying trifles into issues which disturb the peace of those who want to be our brothers, from confusing our prejudices with real principles, from loving systems more than we love You. Save us, O God, from the spirit which cannot argue without losing its temper, from the spirit which is concerned with its place and its prominence and its prestige, from the spirit which is more concerned to display itself than to reveal the love of Jesus Christ.

Save us, O God, from being quicker to criticize than to praise, from being more ready to condemn than to forgive, from the selfishness which so often dominates our life within your church instead of the service which should direct it.

O GOD, give us the things which will make us truly a congregation of Your people, the fellowship which no bitterness can invade, a friendliness which welcomes the stranger and which makes the shy feel at home, a sympathy which will enable us to bear one another's burdens and to forgive one another's faults.

Help us in all things to seek to know Your will, and when we know it, give us the love which sweetens all () so that we may gladly do it. So make us into a body which You can use, and through which You can act. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

OUR FATHER.....

Reverend 8: 24

In the year 1653

When all things sacred were

Throughout ye nation

Either demolisht or profaned

Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet

Faunted this church:

What singular praise it is

To have done the best things

in ye worst times

And

Hoped them in the most calamitous

"GOD'S CURE FOR WORRY"
(Matthew 6:23-34)

We honestly believe, O God, that there are some things that You wait to give us only as we are part of a gathered company within the shadow of an altar and where a sacred desk has been raised up. Let that happen to us now, that there should be an echo of the Eternal Voice, no matter how feeble nor frail, that could speak to our condition. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

No matter what route you took to get here to church this morning, in all likelihood you weren't looking for a lost elephant. But if you were living in the town somewhere in south Indiana, that might have been a concern of yours. For as of six o'clock this morning they still hadn't been able to retrieve that 4 1/2 ton elephant that had wandered away from the circus that was showing in that town.

As you might suppose, a lot of people are worrying -- a ten-thousand pound elephant is a sizeable chunk, a lumbering mass, that until the captors succeed in getting it back, could do a lot of damage. The owner of the circus is worrying about his liability...people who live in the community are wondering whether or not their children might be safe until the lost elephant is retrieved....and naturally the keeper of the elephant is worrying about his job.

People worry. Worry about almost anything and everything. Most everyone I know worries about something. And some of us even worry about people

whom we're told don't worry! -- because we feel that they ought to measure up to their obligations and they ought to have a healthy concern.

Honestly now, maybe we'll never quite have done with this whole matter of worrying. It's a kind of misery that afflicts us at practically every age. There was an day when youth seemed to escape it, but not any more. It's almost ridiculous. I think the historian of the future will look back upon this age and he might be able to scientifically establish the fact that never since the dawn of civilization would a generation of young people have so much going for them, a situation that has either been improved or is improving, culturally or economically. And yet they're a worried bunch.

As I was putting the finishing touches on the sermon last night, it must have been around 10:30, I think, the door-bell rang. And there I was greeted by them --- and I say it with nothing less than affection and respect in my voice, as is true for what I feel in my heart --- bare-footed, long silken tresses, so their hair flowed to their shoulders....a friend had brought along two other friends. I invited them in and we talked. They helped to write this part of the sermon.

"Tell me honestly," I said, "Do you worry?"

One of them spoke immediately, "Of course we do."

I think I'm reading them aright as I tell you now what I heard them say.....

"We do worry about the war....we worry about the draft....we worry about the possibility of nuclear annihilation -- "

(you know, they are the first group to be brought up with this possible

threat looming over them)

-- they worry about the gap, the gap not necessarily between them and us, but also the gap that exists between them and their peers. Not that I've heard them say it exactly, but I've heard others say it --

"We worry that older folk don't quite understand us, and we worry because we are that way to them and we don't want it to be that way!"

-- and I know some young people who worry because they might grow up and become exactly like us!

-- some of them worry because they have yet to find anything that's really satisfying --

Odd, isn't it, a generation that the historian of the future might look back upon this age and say that never since the dawn of civilization did a generation of young people really have so much going for them...economically.....
..culturally.....in a situation that was endeavoring to be improved, they worry.

So do our elder friends. Our elder folks go to the brink of the grave, anxious about health, money, acceptance -- fully aware of the fact that we live today in an age where half of the population in America is presumed to be under 25 or 30 years of age, and with a generation of young people of whom it has been said, have lost respect for age. Small wonder, then, that those who are older begin to worry as they face the sunset slope of life....

-- will I have enough money to last?

-- will my physical condition begin to deteriorate so that

I wither on the vine?

- - when I may need somebody to care for me, will there be anybody to care?

- - will Social Security benefits continue to meet the increased cost of living?

- - will I always be able to count on Medicare?

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...these are very genuine and very real problems, and there are any number of people who worry about them and toss almost sleeplessly at night, concerned.

I would be less than a pastor if I did not understand how genuinely there are people who worry. Now I must pose the question: Does it become a Christian to worry? The Gospel lesson that was read for you today is the recital of certain words spoken by our Blessed Lord on a hill-top. He was a Penniless Preacher, and He had something to say about this whole matter of worry. . . .

...He said, don't take any thought about the tomorrow.

You worry about clothing, you worry about food. Take one day at a time! . . .

Then He ended up, and we ought always to give Him a chance to finish His sentences:

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you."

But worry we will. And maybe the question-of-questions isn't so much to worry or to worry not but how we might be able to handle this whole pesky business of worrying. It could be said that no word of our Lord Jesus

do we disobey quite as much as His word to us that we ought not to be anxious. This is one reason why some people don't want to find out some things, lest if they learn about them they begin to worry, and they don't want to be crippled by worry. It may sound facetious to you for the moment, but indulge me, won't you -- Bob Hope one time in one of his programs said:

"Today my heart beat 103,369 times, my blood traveled 168,000,000 miles. I breathed 23,040 times, I inhaled 438 cubic feet of air, I ate 3 1/4 pounds of food, drank 2.9 pounds of liquid.

"I perspired 1.43 pints, I gave off 8.56 degrees of heat, I generated 450 tons of energy, I spoke 4,800 words, moved 750 major muscles. My nails grew .00046 inches, and my hair grew .01714 inches, and I exercised 7,000,000 brain cells . . . "

and then in typical Bob Hope fashion, he said,
"Man, am I tired!"

...something that might never have occurred to him if he didn't learn these facts! So there are some people who say, "Don't tell me about it lest in my learning I might worry." So there are those who are to be condemned because they go through life ostrich-like, not worrying.

Well, back to that Penniless Preacher now, on that hill-top:

"Don't be anxious about food, clothing -- consider the birds of the air, consider the lilies of the field -- who's been taking care of them?"

This passage of Scripture deserves careful study. In reality, if you stick with it long enough, let me tell you the conclusion to which you could come.

Jesus Christ is saying to us, to a degree at least,

"Well maybe you can't stop worrying, maybe your problem is learning to concern yourself about the thing that you

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ought to worry about -- (and I use the word worry advisedly). Jesus Christ is saying, There are some things you ought to let Me take care of, and there are certain things that you ought to take care of, and we ought not to get these two realms confused. . . "

But that's precisely what we do. You and I concern ourselves overmuch with food and clothing and shelter -- all the aspects of economic security. For most of us it's the abiding passion. To this end we spend our energy, to make sure that we're always going to have enough to last us in this way, to make certain that there will always be a roof over our head, a bed on which to sleep, and something on the table that we can eat, something that we can wear.....as though we could forever fortify ourselves against every physical element.

Says Jesus Christ, "Why don't you think about it for a minute -- who feeds the birds? Who watches over the lilies of the field? From the very beginning of time (let me paraphrase it for you) -- there's always been a seed-time, there's always been a harvest. And who's taken care of that? I've taken care of it!" says God. "Now as far as you're concerned, why don't you do what you ought to do? Why don't you take care of your department?".....if you let me put that kind of a word in God's lips....."Your job is to concern yourself with the things of the Kingdom, such as peace, and love, and truth -- "

...a kind of rebuke, if you please, on all of us.....

" . . you worry as to whether or not you're going to starve - - leave that to Me. There's always been a seedtime, there's always been a harvest. You worry about the person whose soul is starving, who is suffering from spiritual malnutrition, who needs someone to fortify him with spiritual vitamins. You worry about that!"

But we don't. We keep jumping over it and we get into God's realm.

Let me remind you what is our first introduction to the fact of God. Even the Creed spells it out for us - - our first introduction to the fact of God is His Creator-hood. The fundamental fact of God: that God created us. His first deed was to fashion and world and to bring material into being. His first deed was to order a universe, with the sun and the soil and the rain and the optimum conditions by which seed could germinate and then grow and bear fruit.....

. . . our first introduction to the fact of God along with His creatorhood is that He is Father. And what is a father's responsibility but to provide? - - to see that our needs are met.

This is not a naive approach unto life. It's the most realistic that I can propose for you. Exhibit A? I think there's a woman in this congregation who could be classified by many of us who know her as the happiest one, one at peace with herself, at peace with God, at peace with her fellow-

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men.....and at the same time, a woman who has about as little of this world's goods as any member of this congregation. And at the drop of a hat she'll tell you that God watches over her, and that God's hand has never failed her.

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The trouble with us is, you see, we worry about the wrong things. Let me charge you with the responsibility that becomes me as your Pastor, take you to task as I take my own soul to task: for worrying overmuch as to where the next meal might come from, by not worrying about somebody whose soul is going to Hell. How long has it been since that kept you awake at night?

And if it ever should, you'll know something about God's cure for worry at that point, because then you'll have God coming alongside of you and God says, "It's My concern too. It's breaking My heart, but eventually My truth will prevail and My love will win out."

.....and if that won't be enough to put you to sleep, then
I don't know what will!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer offered by Pastor Raymond Shaheen
September 6, 1970

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MAKE US aware, O GOD, increasingly so, of the precious truth that the Kingdom is Yours, and that the Church is in Your hands, and that the world belongs to You; that You will never allow us, no matter how deliberate or stubborn or wicked we may become, to wrest it completely away from Your control.

ENABLE us to believe, before we leave this place, O GOD, that You do watch over us, and that Your hand is a good hand, and a strong hand, and a sustaining hand, a providing hand, and above all else, a forgiving hand; to the end that when we worry about our sins, when we come to Thee in faith we can be given the blessed assurance that You take them away from us, then that we might concern ourselves without sinning any longer.

OUR FATHER . . .

"MAN'S GREATEST PROBLEM"
(Matthew 15:27)

Down through the ages, O God,
the echo of Your voice continues
to be heard, in this place and
in that place, by this person and
by that person. Here we are.
Could it happen now? Amen.

Through continued study of the Bible I never cease to marvel how one can see that the truth of the Scriptures is timeless, and how frequently contemporary its methods really are. Today, you know, we make a great deal of what we call the 'encounter' experience. It's part of a group therapy procedure, where if a person feels that there's something wrong with him that he can't quite figure out for himself, he might be encouraged to join a group...and like as not there is a leader....and under the guidance of the leader of that group the intent is that through the interplay that occurs, he might come to see himself as he actually is.

It's a risk, of course. Not that a man should take the risk or not take the risk, but a risk sometime that the encounter leadership might not be all that it ought to be. Human as we are, some encounter leaders are very sadistic, and they delight in destroying a personality, and this has happened in some groups. This is one reason why some of us shy away from an encounter group unless we can be sure of the leadership.

It's quite a thing, you know, to expose yourself not only to a group but to a person. Well, these encounter groups are taking place all over the country, with varying degree of success.

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Now let's get back to the opening sentence of this sermon: through continued study of the Scriptures I never cease to marvel how timeless its truth, and how contemporary some of its methods can be. If ever I've known an encounter experience, I surely recognize this one, and I found it, of all places, in the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. Look, now, for the people involved. See how this encounter leader conducts that session:

"Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Some folks I know, when they read this passage of Scripture, can't quite understand why Jesus behaved the way He did. Some say that He was less than a gentleman, that here was a woman in need brought to Him, and He hardly gives her the time of day. To begin with, He ignores her, and doesn't answer her plea at all. And then equally bewildering is the fact that when someone seems to be graciously inclined in her direction, it's not Jesus but the disciples, and even though they do want Him to pay attention to her in

order to get rid of her, nonetheless they are the first to give her any recognition at all.

And then as you read the passage carefully, you discover that when she did get Jesus to say something to her, it was in the measure of a rebuff....but lo and behold, she countered instantly. And then you come to the conclusion, where she says to Him as she stands up to Jesus, "Truth, Lord, yet even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

I'm pressing a point now. It may not be to your liking, but nonetheless I'm going to classify Jesus here as a strategist. From the very beginning when He met the woman He had an objective in mind, an objective that had to work for her good. And all that took place in the meantime was necessary.....

...before He could be of any help to her, she had to see herself as she actually was....she had to hear with her own ears the admission of her own lips.

Now I submit to you that most of us don't care to see ourselves as we actually are. That's why we shy away from some people. They are perceptive enough that they're able to probe, and they see us exactly as we are on the inside, and we know what they see. We don't like it and we don't like other people to see what we are on the inside. Usually we go around always trying to think ourselves better than we are, and there are certain people who seem to make it their business of trying to impress other folk with the kind of person that they just aren't. And the impression that they want to make is that they are better than they are, while down deep

inside they know exactly what they are.

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Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, you know, of another generation or so, the Billy Sunday and the Billy Graham of that day, used to say to congregations when they would assemble, if you wanted to have your picture taken, you'd prepare yourself before you went to the photographer. You made certain that they got the right profile, that they got you from the right angle. But then when the photograph was taken, if you felt that the photograph had flattered you a bit, you sang the praise of the photographer, and you gladly paid, in that day, the \$25.00 and went your way.

...but, said Dwight L. Moody, preacher that he was, if someone could photograph the depth of your heart, most of us would never show up to have that photograph taken.

I've a preacher friend of whom I'm quite fond. One time when I was with him I overheard a conversation that was taking place between him and another mutual friend who is a photographer. And he said to the photographer, "I think you'd better come back and take another photograph of me. The one that you did take, well there are some women in my parish who think that it just doesn't do me justice."I impishly thought to myself, it isn't justice that you need -- it's mercy!

And this is the way we deal with ourselves charitably -- all the time, trying to see ourselves in the better light.

Photographers are not blind to this, either. I think I'm correct when I tell you that we have a member of this congregation who makes a good living as a re-touch expert for Harris and Ewing, for so well does the photographer know that the finished product must be pleasing to the eye of the man who's been photographed.

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Again let it be said that there are some people who know us so well and discover what's down deep on the inside, and we're embarrassed when they find it out. Do you know that that's one reason, I think, why some of us cut off some of our friendships. We've made the acquaintance of certain people, and they're uncanny -- they can probe, and they can find out exactly what we're like. And we don't like it that they've read us that well.

There are some people who say that there are certain folk who will begin to dislike some preachers to whom they listen, because when they sit under that preacher's preaching, they have a way of believing that he has an x-ray on their soul....or if they have an interview with him, they find out that he has a way of discovering what they're like on the inside -- that they haven't fooled him after all. And they feel very uncomfortable that that revelation has occurred.

Some psychiatrists tell me that they see some people for the first time, but they never see them the second time, and it's not merely a matter of professional pride on their part when they say that they honestly believe that they don't come back the second time because, as they met the first time, the psychiatrist had a way of probing and they began to see themselves for the first time in a measure that they had not seen themselves before.

Last night I thoroughly enjoyed that television production of "George M." Some of you who saw it may remember that he, too, had his encounter session -- brash, pushy, aggressive young Georgie, with that agent. And the agent, older and experienced, puts him in his place. And as the agent goes away, young Georgie is heard to say to the person nearest at hand, "There

are some things that I've never believed about myself, but ten minutes with that man and I begin to believe all of them!" And that's the way life is with our relationship with some people.

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We're all concerned with the problems that confront us. When we begin to think of the problems that so easily beset us, we never quite discover one thing that we perhaps ought to deal with at the beginning. We go through life looking for solutions to all kinds of problems, looking for those solutions outside ourselves....

...if only the world would change, we say....

The chap who takes the part of Patton in the movie does it exceptionally well. That side of Patton is revealed when we're led to see him as a man who had his roots in another century....and there's that moment when he exclaims, no so much profanely as almost as a prayer - - "O God, how I hate the twentieth century!" And some of us have had our moments when we look with nostalgia at another period in time, and we say how easy it would have been for us if we could have lived then.....

...if only the world would change....

...if only I were somewhere else....

...if only other people were somewhere else.....

Well, other people are somewhere else, and they have their set of problems, too. Maybe the moment of truth arrives when a man is able to say - - "If only I would change - - - within me is the root of so much that remains troublesome."

Carlyle Marney has said: "There is no point in our continued praying to the Almighty to save a world He has commissioned us to save. The strength is in our hands. The knowledge is in our minds. We lack only the will to be and to do, and for these we can pray."

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But what if a man can't help himself at this point? What if he does see himself to be the problem that he is? Well, he could react Augustine-like and say, "Sinner that I am, O God, take all my sins away - " ...and then in his Confessions he admits that he says under his breath - - "all but one! . . . " How much do we really want to change? How much do we really want to give up hating certain people? For some folks, that's the only measure of security that they have, entrenching themselves within the hate that they have against folk.

But if I know anything at all about the Christian Gospel, I know this to be true: that Jesus Christ changes people's lives, and He changes their lives from the inside out. That's what He came to do, and that's what happened in this encounter with this woman.

But at the end, it all comes down to people, doesn't it? We are the shapers of our environment, physical and social. The greed-at-large that we inveigh against is only our own greed extended many times. This is the point that comes through in James Goldman's play "The Lion in Winter," where Eleanor of Aquitaine and her three sons vie for the right to succeed King Henry. As they meet in the castle of Chinon, France, and begin to plot for the prize, John says, "Richard has a knife." Eleanor answers, "Of course, he has a knife. He always has a knife. We all have knives. It is 1183 and we are barbarians. How clear we make it. Oh, my piglets, we are the origin of war. Not history's forces nor the times nor justice nor the lack of it nor causes nor religions nor ideas nor kinds of government nor any other thing. We are the killers. We breed war. We carry it like syphilis, inside. Dead bodies rot in field and stream because the living ones are rotten. For the love of God can't we love one another - just a little. That's

how peace begins. We have so much to love each other for. We have such possibilities, my children. We could change the world."

But ours is a generation that doesn't believe in simplistic answers. And that, too, is part of our undoing.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
September 13, 1970

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O GOD, We have listened to Your Word. We have been instructed in Your truth. We have sung Your praise. We have talked with You in prayer. Now send us out into the world in Your strength to all the duties and the tasks of this life.

SEND US, O GOD, with a faith so confirmed that it cannot be shaken;

with a hope so sure that no event in the world, no personal experience, can drive it to despair;

with will so fortified in resolution, so armed, that no temptation may overcome us;

with a love so deep that nothing may ever again seduce us from our loyalty to Jesus Christ.

O GOD, send us to live graciously in our homes, to serve diligently at our work, to find joy with purity and pleasure, to bring credit to the name we bear in every situation of this life, and to live so that men may see the loving things we do and give the glory to You.

SEND US from this place in respect for ourselves, and concern for others in obedience to You. Grant that it may not be for nothing that we have worshipped here this day. Keep our minds from forgetting what we have heard, and our wills from faltering in our resolution to obey.

HELP US to go from this place with the light of Your hope in our eyes, with the knowledge of Your truth in our minds, and with the flame of Your love in our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

OUR FATHER.....

September 20, 1970

"HEART SENSE"
(Ephesians 4:2)

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father, from Jesus Christ
His son, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

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Occasionally, perhaps quite early on a Sunday morning, sometime before any of you appear on the scene, I find myself walking around the exterior of the church and the Christian Education Building. In doing so I muse upon the fact that within the course of the morning you will be converging upon this place which constitutes the common base for all of us who are affiliated with this parish, or who may come to worship here on any given Sunday.

I have my moments when I take my tour of the exterior of the church, when I tarry a little bit longer at each of the two cornerstones. There's one right out here, the chief stone for the Christian Education Building. Then there is one right near the red doors, the main entrance to the Nave. As I reflect I think of what might have happened, and surely what did happen, on those two significant days in the life of this congregation, when the church people gathered and marked another milestone in their history and in their development.

I presume Pastor Lee and I presume Pastor Sorrick were the ones responsible for drawing up the list of the things that would be included in the sealed box that would be put in each of the two chief stones. From my knowledge of what goes into cornerstones, undoubtedly they included in their list a coin or a bit of the currency of the realm at that time....the roster of the entire parish membership, at that time....the official listing of those

who constituted membership on Church Council and the Building Committee....
...it could be that also included was the most recent copy of the local
press....and undoubtedly a copy of the Holy Scriptures. Customarily these
are the things that go into cornerstones.

Now would you believe me when I tell you that the Rev. Dr. John Mellon,
Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in New York City, when they were about
to lay the chief stone in a new wing of the educational building, insisted
that there be no copy of the Holy Scriptures included. Now this just a few
years ago.

This is a rather unconventional reaction on his part, but he had his
reason. He said the Scriptures were never intended to be entombed in stone,
the Bible was intended to be enshrined in the hearts of men and women and to
be placed into their hands. Preacher Mellon, I understand, stood his ground
and no copy of the Scriptures went into that cornerstone.

If I should meet Preacher Mellon some day, I think I'd like to talk
with him a bit. I'd be constrained to tell him that I don't quite agree with
what he's done. But on the other hand, I think I could tell him that he
could add to his reasons why the Scriptures ought not to be included in a
cornerstone. Not that I myself would follow it, but I would remind him that
there are those who tell us today that there are an increasing number of
people who say that the Scriptures do not speak to our time, that the Scrip-
tures just aren't relevant....

...now the coin, the currency of the realm, that's
relevant...

...the listing of the church membership as of that
day -- that's relevant and current....

...the copy of the most recent issue of the local

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press --- that speaks to and of our day...

that's relevant.....

...but any number of people tell me that the Bible speaks of a day that has come and gone, the Bible belongs to the past, and unfortunately, an increasing number of people feel that it just doesn't make sense in today's world.

Had you listened carefully when the Lessons were read this morning, you would have noted that the Lesson reader brought to our attention something that the Apostle Paul said to Christians. He meant it not only for the people of his day but for any day. The Apostle Paul said, "You people who take the name of Christ, you ought to live each day according to your calling - - and that means - - " (he spelled it out) - - "that means you ought to be gentle, that means you ought to be humble, that means you ought to be patient."

And like as not, if I read you correctly, and I think I do, you would argue with him, if you would allow yourself that privilege, you'd say to him - - "Preacher Paul, it sounds very good. But we know where that kind of thing will get you, because we know where it got you! You even admit that when you hand down this kind of prescription, you yourself are in jail! - - and you expect us to be gentle and meek and patient?"

...and then if we wanted to, become very bold and very brazen, we could say to Jesus Christ: "Jesus, a long time ago, you said something about this love business, and You yourself personified patience and meekness and gentleness. Look where it got you! - - just because you were gentle, just because you were meek, just because you were loving. They put You on a cross - - that's where this kind of thing

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gets a person - - - "

We live in a dog-eat-dog world. In this man's world of ours. if you want to get ahead you just don't get ahead by being meek, gentle, and patient. For if one lives that way, people walk all over him, shove you aside, and you never get ahead. It just doesn't make sense.

Why, I know you well enough, this is Sunday morning talk for us. We'll talk about being gentle, meek, mild and patient and loving when we have the situation and the setting that we have right now. But it isn't Monday morning language, it isn't the way we think and we behave --- out there--- tomorrow. There are those who tell me that it sounds very good, but in this man's world it just doesn't hold water.

But oddly enough, honestly now, somehow we wish that it did, for we want people to be meek and mild and gentle and patient --- with us! In my worst moments, if it's anything that I need most, it's for somebody to be patient with me. When I'm at my ugliest, that's when I need love! So you and I reason. Don't we wish that it did make sense, at least make sense to other people to treat us that way.

Why doesn't it make sense to us, though? Do you suppose it could be that we've never been able to figure out the mind of God? That's God's way of looking at things, that's God's prescription for His world. God made the world, and God said this is the way the world was intended to run. It was meant to operate on the basis of love and patience and kindness. Why won't we listen to Him? Why won't we allow it to make sense to us? Maybe it's because God is so far above us, and ahead of us, that we just don't quite understand the way He thinks and the way He operates. With tongue-in-cheek I say we ought to give Him credit for something, if for

no other reason, then surely because of His age! God's been around for quite a while, and He fully intends to be around a good while longer, and age itself ought to qualify Him to speak. It's the voice of Eternity that says to us: "Try it this way."

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It's not only that He speaks out of wisdom, but He speaks because He'd the God-of-the-long-view. You and I have our eyes glued to the immediate moment, and we allow ourselves to react immediately because we are hurt, and we're shoved, and we're pushed. God takes the long view, thinks in terms of the day-after-tomorrow-and-the-day-beyond-that. Don't you dare misunderstand me, it's not a word against honest inquiry, this earnest seeking after God. We're divinely endowed with these minds of ours, and we're intended to act intelligently. But let's admit at the very start that there may be a limit beyond which we can go. It could be that God remains over and above us, and we will never be able to reduce to our level God's way of figuring out a thing, God's way of thinking. So this respectful distance remains, and it can be an awesome thing, which encourages them to act in faith, and to trust Him, and to try His way.

I submit to you, having been around as long as I have now and observed a thing or two about human nature, it's almost incredible the end to which some people will go in order to get even, to get back. They scheme and they plot and they plan - - they'll use almost an endless amount of energy, just to retaliate. I beg you, if only sometime we'd use just half as much energy according to God's proposal, how different our lot might be. I know for myself, when I become weary, it's almost pure hell when I run out of love,

when I run out of patience. If I'd only take time to be just quiet long enough to tap all over again the divine eternal resources that are there! But this isn't the human way of doing things. So down through the corridors of time comes the echo of the Eternal Voice - - "Try it My way." That's God's word to us.

If only we'd make it our business to search out His way, then, even though we can't understand it, and then to live as though it were true. I want you to indulge me for a moment when I recall for you a story. It's an exceedingly precious story, a short story written by a distinguished Finnish author. She lived by the sea and she loved the sea, and naturally her character is a man-of-the-sea....

...he was a man who lived in Spain. His name, Vincente of Formentara. He had been quite a man in his day, and he tried to make a mark for himself, but he never quite succeeded. In his frustration and in his failure he returned to his home town, and like many another man before him, tried to begin all over again at the lowest rung in the ladder....

...he became a porter, and he stood there at the wharf and the harbor, ready for any man who would take advantage of his availability. He had that porter's cap, it had a number on it, and in broken English he'd stand there - - "Me, Vincente! - - Me, Vincente! - - - my number is - - - !" "

...then one day there was the American who came into port, and his eye fell upon Vincente, and he motioned, and Vincente was glad. He found his way to the American and the American said to him, in a way that he felt he was being understood, "My two bags - - and

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that thing." Then he gave him to understand that he had to handle that thing very, very carefully. That thing happened to be an amphora, a prized antique Phoenician jug....

...Vincente wrestles with the two suitcases, tries to fasten the amphora to his back....but he's caught up in the crowd, jostled and pushed, and then in one moment, in almost a thousand pieces there breaks upon the ground hundreds of years of ancient history! Completely horrified by what he's done, he somehow tries to make known to the American that he wants to make amends. And Vincente, says the Finnish author, ~~has~~ the man of the noble, the good intention.....

...the American quite philosophically reacts to his loss, knowing full well that never in a life-time could Vincente replace or restore it. But Vincente, mark you, is the man of the good, the noble intention. He pursues the American to his hotel room, and he begs him, as the author tells us, to give him his name and his address. According to the story, the man reaches for a scrap of paper, perhaps the back of an old envelope, and writes: Abraham Lincoln Smith, 52 Hudson Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA...

...Vincente prizes the scrap of paper. He becomes, as always, the man of the good and the noble intention. He has heard that years ago the amphora, the Phoenician jug, was used to convey wine and grain, and occasionally the sailors would cast the empty ones overboard. So he's led to believe that they might still be found, prized amphora, the Phoenician jug, in the depth of the sea.

...Vincente gets himself a boat. He's told he must have a

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snorkel outfit -- he's sixty years of age, he has never learned to swim -- he learns to swim. The people of the little community say he's the crazy one....

...the weeks, the months pass. Then one day there is washed ashore Vincente's boat. Inside the boat, safely secured, an amphora. But no Vincente....never again to be seen, presumably lost at sea....

...the author says to the village priest, "Tell me, what do you think?" The village priest folds his hands as if in prayer, and with deep understanding in his eyes he says, "Vincente -- he was not crazy as they thought. He was the man of the good and the noble intention. He was the man-of-the-search. And the prize so often is in the searching, not always in the finding."

...because the author could speak and write English, those who knew about the address suggested that he might write Abraham Lincoln Smith, 52 Hudson Street, Milwaukee, USA. The author concludes by saying, "I wrote, but I got no reply. The letters were returned. Then I took it upon myself to write the Mayor of the city and asked him to make his investigation, and the Mayor's office replied that no such person could be found in Milwaukee, USA . . . "

Oh, it could be that the man, impatient and eager to have done with Vincente, simply wrote off the name that came first to his mind, any kind of a name, just to get rid of him. But Vincente was the man of the noble intention, who was bent on doing what he believed was the good thing. They called him crazy....

...but maybe that's the way it might come out in the end in this world of ours: the crazy ones, who search and live after God's way, the sanest ones in the end.

* * *

MAY it never be, O GOD, that we forget You have given us so much.

May it never be, O God, that what we bring be anything less than expressions of gratitude, for You are the Giver or all good gifts. And there are so many things for which we ought to thank You:

For everything that helps us to worship You:
For Your Book to teach us Your truth, to tell us of Your
power, to show us of Your love;
For the music to which we listen, and in which we lift
our voices to You;
For the many memories which gather around us in this place;
For all the prayers that have gone up to You in this church
from Your praying people from age to age;
For the preaching of Your word in challenge and in comfort.

We thank You, O God, for everything that gives us a clearer grasp of the truth, for those with the gift of communicating truth in speech and in writing, for those with whom we talk and argue and discuss and differ, but with whom we never quarrel;

For the example of all good and Godly men and women, for moments when You spoke to us directly and guided us in comfort, in counsel, in rebuke, in warning.

O GOD, We thank you for everything that helps us to go on living and working, even when it's an effort almost more than we can make;
For those who trust us and who believe in us, and whom we cannot let down;
For those whose care surrounds us every day, for the sense of duty which will not allow us to shuffle comfortably out of our responsibilities, for that strength of Yours which again and again has been made perfect in our weakness, and has made us able to pass the breaking point and not to break.

O GOD, Forgive us for the sins of our lives, even for the sins for which we cannot forgive ourselves; for the ingratitude which took everything and spoke no word of thanks;
For the self-will which made us take our own way, even when we were well aware that it was not Your way;
For the blindness, the insensitiveness, the thoughtlessness, which made us hurt others, sometimes with callous deliberation, sometimes without even knowing that we were doing it;
For our disloyalties to You and to our loved ones and our friends, for which we are bitterly ashamed.

O GOD, Thank You for Jesus Christ, Who has shown us the Way.

OUR FATHER

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"AS I SEEM TO ME"
(Nehemiah 6:11)

It's some echo of Your voice, O
God, that we need to hear. In
Your own way prepare our hearts,
that we may not miss it. Through
Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord.
Amen.

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Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the author of "A School For Scandal" has a very fascinating moment when one of a number of a small group which had gathered together decides he's going to leave. He makes his departure prematurely....now get it again - - he's the first one to leave. The others will be remaining. And as this character stands at the door, realizing full well the risk involved in being the first to leave, the character turns around and says, "I go, but I leave my reputation behind me."

Undoubtedly, as any bridge club member knows, as any member of a drawing-room group knows, that when one is the first to leave, his image remains; and it could be depending upon the nature and the character of those who are present, that image could be tossed about rather feverishly from person to person. This is the risk that's taken.

But a significant thing is this: what really matters isn't so much what other people may think of us. The important thing that matters most is what that character thought of himself, or herself, as he or she left the room early.

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I want to talk with you this morning about this very important problem, this whole matter of self-esteem. For basically a man behaves according to the opinion that he has of himself. Let him be able to hold on to some basic integrity in his own character, and he'll be able to withstand the struggle that life itself eventually brings. It's a very serious problem here in this world today, this whole matter of self-esteem.....

...what do you think of yourself?

...how is this opinion being fashioned?

...what is the basic ground for this opinion
that you have of yourself?

And would you believe it? After all we've said about pride being the worst of sins, there is the possibility that there could be a "proper" pride -- the word is chosen carefully -- essential to one's growth and emergence into manhood. How about letting the poet speak to this point: "He who would climb and soar aloft must ever keep alive within his soul the tonic of a wholesome pride."

...now you must keep this in mind all the time this sermon is being preached. It's dealing with the tonic of a wholesome pride. It is in that sense that you must understand it.

Something is happening to the heart of America in particular. We're losing respect, losing respect for ourselves, losing respect for those who are our leaders, losing respect for our institutions. There are those who say this is happening because there are so many of us, and just because there are so many of us we're being pushed around and jostled, being ground

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underfoot. And after a while we got a rather cheapened estimate of ourselves. Whenever there's an increasing quantity of anything, you run the risk of de-valuating the quality. There are so many of us that we're pushed around that eventually we may begin to say to ourselves, well it doesn't make any difference -- I'm nobody among so many. There are people who live in apartment houses -- just one among so many, and something could happen to them and any number of people couldn't care less! -- never even take note of it.

For years, now, I have been going back to a barber, back in my home town. I remember so well when he paid his first visit to New York City. I don't know that he's ever gotten over it -- he just couldn't take the push and the jostle. He took God's name and exclaimed, "Why, if a man fell down in the gutter, they'd just push on and walk over him -- they couldn't care less!"

...it's so alien to Al's spirit, because Al has been cutting hair, you see, for grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and then great-grandfathers and grandfathers, and he has this marvelous out-going spirit, and he has a high regard for every single one of his customers, and he talks to them about their children and he talks to them about their problems, and he has a high regard for them....

And I presume one reason why Al has a high regard for them is because he has a high regard for himself, he knows the price that's been paid for all the good things that he enjoys here in America. He remembers how his

parents came over from Sicily, he remembers how they had to fight with the pioneer spirit, even in the hinterland of Pennsylvania, just to exist. Because he has a high regard for himself, he has a high regard for others.

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I say to you, there's something happening here in America. We're cheapening ourselves, generally speaking. We don't have enough of Al Carduccis any more. It's because we don't much care for ourselves that we don't much care how we look! . . .

...and maybe it's because we don't much care for ourselves that we don't much care what other people think!

...and maybe it's because we don't much care about ourselves that we don't much care about the way we behave, and the way we treat other people.

We lack a healthy self-esteem. And lacking a healthy self-esteem, we don't much give it to other people, either.

I would never believe that I would live so long to see a day when an Office would be disrespected, the Office of the President of the United States of America.....when an institution such as our Government would be decried and derided. I never thought that I would live to see the day when representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ would be looked upon with scorn and ridicule.

I have an apology that I publicly make at this time to the two Parish Deaconesses who have served this congregation. I wish I would have done it when Sister Josephine first came here, I wish I would have done it when

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Sister Dorothy made her appearance. I wish I would have insisted that every member of the catechetical class that she would be teaching would stand when she entered the room, as a measure of respect, if not for the person, then for what she represented - - an individual with integrity and devotion to the cause of Jesus Christ who passes so many of the things that you and I so easily enjoy, such as home and family, let alone a certain economic standard, just in order to be as one who serves.

For one reason or another, I'm not quite certain, we've lost this measure of respect for an office, for an institution, and for our elders - - for those who teach us, for those who guide us. Oh, I know that it's good Scripture that those who have such positions of responsibility should become worthy of our respect, but if perchance, all of us being stained by original sin, the situation may not be as ideal as we would like it to be, nonetheless the office remains.

Could it be that it does stem from the fact that we've lost some high regard for ourselves? - -

- - what do you think of yourself?
- - what do you hear yourself saying to yourself?
- - just who do you know yourself to be?

Years ago I came to the conclusion that, generally speaking, we do what we do because we are what we are, and it doesn't behoove any of us to try to hide behind the extenuating forces and factors of circumstances. Basically, we do what we do because we are what we are. And we have our moments when we make the decision that we're going to become the kind of person that we are, come hell or high water.

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Jean-Paul Sartre, a very clever man indeed, tells how during World War II one of his pupils came to him, on the horns of a dilemma: he had an opportunity to escape from France and live in London, and there help and abet the cause of the Freedom For France movement under the leadership, no less, of De Gaulle himself....on the other hand, he was torn by an obligation which he recognized -- the only member of his family to stay in France and to care for his aging mother. He asked Sartre to make up his mind, to tell him what to do. Sartre stoutly refused. He said, this is a decision that you have to make, not really on the basis of the one choice may be wrong and the other one right, but simply on the basis that once you've made the decision, you'll have some idea of the kind of person you're going to become.

The decisions that we make reflect our basic character. Now all of this is based upon the inspiration that comes from a text, you'll have to go to the Old Testament to find it. It's a very interesting character by the name of Nehemiah. Nehemiah had a responsible position under the king. He also had a keen desire to be of special service to his own people. He wanted to go back to the destroyed city of Jerusalem and re-build the wall, a very noble dream and intention, and he got special dispensation, special permission to do it.

But people don't always appreciate those who are nobly-intentioned. This is part of the hazard that comes to us when we live -- there are those who don't quite understand what we're about. And they stand on the sidelines and make snide remarks, and try constantly to undermine and to ridicule. And that's exactly what happened to Nehemiah....

...but Nehemiah went back -- and can't you picture

him there, trying to re-build the wall, putting stone upon stone in place.....and then down below, the peanut-minded people making fun of him, trying to destroy him, and some people encouraging him to quit, to go away.....

Then at that moment you have Nehemiah drawing up to his full manhood and simply saying: "Should such a man as I flee?"

...Nehemiah was not made of the stuff of which cowards are made. He had this high and lofty opinion of himself. He was meant for a noble purpose, and he'd forever keep that rendezvous with the basic integrity of his own character.

Have you, my friend, discovered the basic character in your own soul for which you are keeping constantly some kind of a rendezvous? What do you hear when you hear yourself talking to yourself? What do you see when you see yourself in the mirror? As I seem to me: what, now, is it?

O. Henry tells about a boy who grew up in a certain small town, in one of his stories, and at that time he was very much in love with a pure and an innocent girl. But then, O. Henry says, he leaves the small town and goes to the big city....and he completely lets loose and does everything that's consonant with a man who gets a cheap opinion of himself. One day as he's walking down the street, inadvertantly his eye falls upon the girl from his home town -- she does not see him but he sees her --- and it dawns upon him how pure and innocent she really is. And O. Henry has his character leaning against the brick wall and crying out: "O God, how I hate myself!"....all of a sudden he got this glimpse of the man he really had become.

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But in the sight of God, a man doesn't have to stay there hating himself. Dr. Sangster, a very wonderful pastor, used to tell about his relationship with a man in his congregation who went struggling through life, and every now and then he just found himself in the gutter. And his preacher-pastor friend pleaded with him, "Whenever you get headed in that direction, you just come and together we'll wrestle with this thing." ...and the man remembered what the pastor said and he sought him out. And in the course of their conversation he said to his pastor, "Tell me, Pastor, for God's sake tell me -- tell me I don't belong in the gutter!"

There's something down deep in a man, when he really sees himself, that makes him believe that he was not meant for the gutter, he was not meant to be consigned to Hell. In the sight of God, every man ought to see himself as he is, a child of God, an object of God's love, one for whom Jesus Christ came into the world to suffer and to die and to redeem him! Every Christian has a price tag on his head. It's not to be a price tag that he himself places, but it's the price tag that God himself has placed upon that person.

When the young German martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, lay incarcerated in the concentration camp, regarded by all who knew him as a saint, he himself was filled with self-doubt. And in anguish of spirit one day he wrote this poem:

Who am I: this, or the other?
Am I one person today,
and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once - a hypocrite
before others,
And before myself a contemptible,
woebegone weakling?
Who am I? They mock me,
These lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God,
I am Thine."

This becomes the ground, the tonic of the wholesome pride for every
man who, under God, is entitled to a measure of self-esteem.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Festival of Harvest

October 11, 1970

"GOD IN THE PRESENT TENSE"
 (Exodus 3:5)

We hear so many voices these days, O God, and we hardly know what to believe. Perhaps in this time spent in this place, and before we turn our backs upon this altar, it might be some echo of the Eternal Voice, with a Christian accent, that may come to us. So we pray. Amen.

The title for this morning's sermon is "God in The Present Tense" and the text, it's the fifth verse of the third chapter of the Book of Exodus:

"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

Now tell me, what in the world do you suppose a text like that means? There was a day, so it's been said, when a preacher stood up, Bible in hand, and read from the Good Book, but the people before him had some idea as to what the text meant. He could safely presume that his congregation was familiar with the pages of sacred Scripture.

No so any more. Strange, isn't it, that in an age that has become so much more literate, and in an age that has so much better communication, when word does get around and when people do read, any other comment to the contrary -- we have so much readily available -- that the Scriptures seem to be read less. How odd that years ago, when there was not much to read,

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the Bible was most read and frequently quoted. In fact they tell me now the situation is such that professors in the art of preaching in theological seminaries are giving this kind of advice to their students: for goodness' sake, if you want to get the people's attention when you stand up to preach, don't begin by quoting your text! You'll turn them off! to begin with, you might be dealing with something so very unfamiliar to them, to say nothing of the style of language that becomes Scripture (and I may use the word rather recklessly)

...but they do say the trick of the trade might well be that since you are a Lutheran preacher and you must base your sermons upon Scripture, and you must have a text -- introduce the text only about a third way through your sermon, because then at last, maybe with whatever introduction you use, you will have had your congregation with you....but if you begin with the text you might turn them off and you'll never quite recoup them by the time the sermon is concluded.

Well, I submit to you, that as I understand this text, frankly I can't preach this sermon to you without beginning with the text. So the theological seminary professor notwithstanding, bravely now, the text, please:

"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

Tell me now, what does the text mean to you?

But you say quickly, "Preacher, that's your business. That's what

preachers are for, isn't it? -- to explain the text." Well, if you want to talk that way to me, I shan't shirk my responsibility, and I'm prepared to tell you what I think the text means....at least in this sermon I'll tell you what I think the text means.

To understand what the text means you've got to know something about the man to whom the words were spoken. That's why Bible reading is so important, because this was no ordinary man to whom these words were spoken, and these were not ordinary words. And it's only as you read the Bible that you become familiar with this unique personality who stands out so luminously in the pages of time.

Moses was an unusual chap, in fact he's one of those rare people who should never have been born at all! -- when you focus him against the background of his day...

...there happened to be an Egyptian king who was advised by certain cohorts who were quite anxious about the contemporary scene, and they talked about population control -- yes, population control way back then. The advisors to the Egyptian king said, There are too many Jews around...we've got to control the population, and we'll control the population by extermination....as soon as they're born into the world, at least the male species, we'll get rid of them.....

Now any woman who deserves the name of 'mother' doesn't easily and voluntarily give up her child, the child of her womb. This man Moses happened to have that kind of a mother. The edict of the Egyptian king notwithstanding, she made up her mind that she'd hold

on to this Jewish boy as long as she possibly could, and very cleverly she waterproofed his cradle -- that's the way you can put it -- and when she had to go off as forced labor to work in the fields, not far from the banks of the River Nile, she gently put him into the Nile....and he could bob back and forth in that little hand-made cradle of hers. On occasion she saw fit to tuck him away inside the bulrushes, or the growth there at the edge of the river, that he might have a secluded spot.

Well one day -- it's a fascinating story, and here again you're fortunate if you have been a Bible reader -- the king's daughter came along and her eye fell upon the child and she couldn't resist him, and she said, "I'll take him home."....and just to show you how wonderful God's plans can be unfolded, the king's daughter wasn't about to care in a menial way for the child, so she said, "I must have somebody to care for him"....and the child's mother was chosen. Who in this great big world was better qualified to care for that particular child than the mother herself who brought him into the world?.....so off they went to the royal palace.

The years were eventful and they passed quickly. Now when this text is recorded, -- zero in on the situation, the back-ground against which you have to see this man: he's on the other side of the Jordan, by the Sinai peninsula, and he's tending a flock of sheep -- they don't belong to him but they belong to his wife's father.....he has blood on his hands, because he's never been able to deny his own blood -- it was more than he could take one day when he saw the injustice being dealt to a fellow Jew, and in a fit of uncontrollable temper he killed the

task-master. So he had to run for his life. So there he finds himself, in this very unpromising situation, with a glorious past behind him, taking care of somebody else's sheep.

But it's then and there that the voice of God is heard:

"Moses, put off your shoes, take them off
of your feet -- you're standing on holy
ground right now."

I honestly believe that this text is relevant to our day, because as I reflect upon Moses I think he might have reasoned within himself:

"The better days are over."

...as I reflect upon Moses, I think he might have said to himself, "These are evil days that have come upon us. My people are enslaved, they are leaderless, the Egyptians are strong. How good I had it back there then!"

...and he might have developed within his own mind what I am pleased to refer to as a 'conspiracy against the present' -- he dreaded what might have been termed the unfortunate aspects of the present moment.

I think I'm kin to Moses in this regard. May I suggest that maybe you are, too. If your age is such that you can look back 30-some years ago, and look upon a day that was far less unsettled than now, you might wish that the clock might have stopped back there then. This is part of the obstacle course that has to be run in middle life, because we've reached the point where we can look back, and when some of us look back we look back rather romantically -- they were better days!

So Moses might have felt that way. But then, precisely at that time, God breaks through. And if I know anything at all about the meaning of this

text it's the immediacy of the awareness of God -- God spoke to him in the present moment -- then and there! And he became aware of God.

Some of us almost have a conspiracy against the present right now. We should live so long to have to live in an age such as ours!

...governments are corrupt

...the Church is losing its influence

...there's a complete disregard for the absolutes

...the respect for spiritual values is gone

by the board

....and we say ours is an age where anything goes, and no matter where you look nor where you find yourself, that's exactly what's on top of you -- anything. And for the first time in our lives some of us are able to say we don't think that we can be shocked at anything from here on in. We've been exposed to it already...

...is this the way we dare think?

To think such, you see, is to stop, and this is one thing that we just daren't do.

I'm not so sure that the past was as romantic and as idyllic as we allow ourselves to believe, but it's the nature of man to think that way. You can read for yourselves in Scriptures, occasionally you come across a Psalm that refers to the 'good old days' when Moses was leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness.....well the truth of the matter is, they weren't 'good old days.' There were 600,000 stragglers, and every single one of them gave their leader a tough time, and they whined, and they grunted, and they groaned. The only thing they could keep saying to him on occasion was, "Why didn't you let us back in 'those good old days' before this day"?.....

There's a book that's been written that has a fascinating title "Locked

In A Room With Open Doors." It's a story about three brothers. Two brothers deal with a third one who has an idiosyncrasy -- he's very uncomfortable about being anywhere with the doors that are ajar and open, a very peculiar thing. So two of the brothers say to this third one, as much as to indicate: "We're fed up with this kind of behavior on your part -- one of these days we're going to lock you to a chair, make you secure, inside a room with nothing but open doors." Maybe our idiosyncrasy is that we're obsessed with the fact that all the doors around us are shut, and there's no way out. And so one of the things that we do, then, is that we begin to blame the situation in which we find ourselves. And when there isn't anything else to blame, we blame the age. And our patron saint might be Shakespeare's character who says, "The fault, dear brothers, does not lie in ourselves, but in our systems."

That, I submit to you, is true only to a degree. And a man is a fool who allows himself to go through life always blaming somebody else. The point at which to begin to improve any situation is with yourself, and that's exactly what God was trying to get across to this man when He came to him in the present moment....."If you want the future to be better, Moses, then it has to begin with you, and you begin right now."

I suppose Moses was pretty well shook up. I suppose he was quite startled, because it really is something to have God appear to you in the present moment. We don't have much trouble with a God in the past -- it's quite easy to keep God in the past and to think about God in the 'good old days,' or to confine God in the future when some day we may have to meet Him.....but God in the present moment!

You know, maybe that's one reason why people were so unresponsive to Jesus Christ. They just couldn't get themselves to believe that God had anything to do with the present moment. I suggest to you that if God doesn't have anything to do with the present moment, then you don't have much of a God. But our God is the God-of-The-Present-Moment, - -

...and herein lies our hope.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED LUKE"

It has happened before, O God, that when men and women would gather together in a holy place, and especially within the shadow of an altar, that Your voice could be heard. We'd like to have that happen right now, no matter how feeble nor frail the echo of the voice might be. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

"What's in a name?" asked Shakespeare, and then the Bard of Avon went on to give an answer to his question. "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." But the literary genius was only half right in his answer, for as anyone knows, a rose is always something more than just fragrance.

But names are important. According to Jewish-Christian tradition, names were very carefully chosen. Those who carefully select names today might choose for their daughter the name Karen, because they know that the name Karen means pure -- and that's exactly what they would like a daughter of theirs to embody all the days of her years . . .

...it could be that parents might choose the name Dorothy for a daughter of theirs, and then they would remind themselves particularly of the baptism moment, for the name Dorothy means 'gift from God' and day by day and year by year they would seek to influence this daughter of theirs, by virtue of the fact that they look upon her as something that God has given to them....

...the name Winifred means 'lover of peace' - and hopefully anyone so named might live peacefully with those near and dear to her.

What's in a name? There is something in a name. Today happens to be a saint's name's day. October 18 in the calendar of the Church is Saint Luke the Evangelist Day. I can't tell you, honestly I can't, just how October 18 happened to be named for Saint Luke, but since it happens to be our name's day, we ought to give it more than ordinary attention.

I suppose I should submit to you that I don't know exactly how this congregation happened to choose the name of Saint Luke. Back in those beginning days of this congregation, one of the first things they had to decide for themselves, those 100 people -- well, what will we call ourselves?

In conversation yesterday with Mrs. Heindel, one of our charter members, I learned that they had a meeting, and one of the things on the agenda was to choose a name for the young congregation. She tells me she preferred Emmanuel, and she had hoped that her husband would propose that name. There were other names likewise suggested, but the story has it that the mission developer, Dr. Bieber, a very strong and dynamic individual, favored the name Saint Luke. And it could be that out of respect for him, that when the vote was taken the die was cast. For thirty years, now, we have been known as Saint Luke Congregation, and we'll be having that name, God willing, for a long time to come.

We can well afford, then, on this Saint Luke Day, to take time out in this sermon period to talk about Saint Luke. I can't tell you what the name Luke means, but I'll do the next-best thing -- I'll try to tell you something about him.

I can tell you that he was not, surprisingly enough for many of you -- he

was not one of the original twelve disciples. He never knew the joy of being there directly and closely related to Jesus Christ. There were those who were privileged to be part of the 'inner circle' -- "And then Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John" . . . never was it to have been said, "And then Jesus took with Him Peter, James and Luke - " He was, if you please, a disciple's disciple. That means that what he learned about Jesus Christ he learned from somebody else who knew Jesus Christ.

...now I can't make too much of that. In this day and age, most of us are kept away from the great ones. Only a select privileged few constitute an 'inner circle.' And yet the truly great of any generation leave their mark, as well they should, and we are the better because of it. If we are to know the great, then we get to know them only through others who have come to know them, and they transmit to us something of their greatness and their goodness, by what they tell us about them. To the everlasting credit of those who related to Luke the fact of Jesus Christ, they did it exceptionally well. Whatever Luke learned about Jesus Christ he learned it well. So much so that when he established his record of the life and teachings of Jesus, he was able to give us a very accurate account for the record.

I said to you earlier, you can't make too much of this point. Sometimes I would like to go to a certain meeting where it's been announced in advance that a distinguished person is going to be on the platform -- he will appear in person. But as all of us know, it's quite impossible to be in two places at one time, so I can't get there....so I'm dependent, then, upon what I'm going to read as the account of that meeting. I'll read a columnist, I'll listen to a commentator. But realistically now, I'm at the mercy of the

columnist and the commentator's prejudices. It could well be that what I get from that meeting I'll have to get as it's filtered through his mind and through his spirit. It's almost impossible to be purely objective.

And I find this is true sometimes when somebody comes and reports to me first-hand, that is, I do talk with a person who had been there, and then as I probe, realistically again, I discover as I walk away that what perhaps I received was not so much a true account of what the man said as what the person wished the man might have said, or what it seemed to him that he thought he had heard him say.

It takes a bit of doing to transmit the event and the experience. Parents have to be very careful, because they are a transmittal agent...as an example, in the understanding of the nature and the character of God, in an understanding of the concept of the Church. There are any number of youngsters in this congregation whose understanding of this parish is given to them through the accent and the identification of the parents! It's an awesome responsibility, then, to transmit accurately and carefully. To the everlasting credit of the people to whom Luke looked, the impression of Jesus Christ was made in such a vital way that we are able to say that Luke has given us a good and accurate account.

The second thing that I can tell you about him is this: that when he would relate the life and teachings of Christ, he related it in a perfectly beautiful and lovely way. Scholars who are in a position to speak tell us that there is no lovelier book in the entire New Testament than the Gospel that bears the name of Luke, and perfectly beautiful at that. He presents Jesus Christ in a very winsome way. In final preparation of this sermon I

took time out yesterday just to sit down, at one sitting at that, to read the entire Gospel according to Luke as though I hadn't read it before. And from the very first sentence in the first chapter to the last sentence in the last chapter one is able to put Luke's gospel down, then, having read it, and get this very lovely and beautiful picture of God's Son come to us to be our Saviour.

In this day and age, we need to present Jesus Christ in a winsome way, in a perfectly beautiful and lovely fashion. I still have ringing in my ears the measure of indictment that came to some of us members of the staff as we had lunch together this past week. I hope that there's no question in your mind about the integrity of your staff and their earnest desire to give you the best of their time and energy and their God-given talents. But as we throw ourselves so whole-heartedly in the task before us, human as we are, we have our moments of frustration, if not our days, and this happened to be for some of us one of those days.....when one member of the staff spoke up and said, "We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, for we're given the privilege to be engaged in the most wonderful thing in the world, to share the good news of Jesus Christ!" The indictment has brought the light back into some of our eyes, and I would hope a measure of a spring in the step as well. Luke forever had that...As you read what he has to say about Jesus Christ.

I can also tell you this about Luke: that when he recorded the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, he recorded Him as one who was meant for everybody. In this day and age of polarization, when it's so easy for people to go off in their little corner and to box themselves in, and to even bring God down to their level as though God belonged to them and to them alone, we're reminded

by Luke the Evangelist who made much of the fact that Jesus Christ belongs to everybody.....

...unlike Matthew, who was a Jew -- and by the way, you ought to know that Luke was the only Gentile writer in the entire New Testament -- unlike Matthew, a Jew, who wrote his Gospel especially geared for Jews that they might see Jesus Christ as the Messiah, therefore he traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham and there he stops.....but Luke, bless his soul, wanted to make much of the fact that Jesus Christ belongs to every man. When he traces the genealogy of Jesus Christ, he goes all the way back to Adam.....

...and as I read the Gospel according to Luke, I am much impressed by the fact that he seems constantly to focus his eye on the disadvantaged ones of his day -- culturally, socially, economically, politically and even religiously -- or I might even say especially the religiously disadvantaged. The Jews had no dealing with the Samaritans. So Luke keeps putting a Samaritan story in front of people....Luke is the only one who puts in front of us the story of the Good Samaritan. It's Luke who singles out, doesn't he? -- that of the ten lepers who received cleansing, only one returned, and he was a Samaritan. It's Luke who brings to our attention that there is always the possibility of a response, even from those whom we might not expect to respond.....

...it's Luke who rings the changes on the fact that Jesus Christ had a special interest in the lost. He did not close

his eyes to them and mark them off. It's Luke who gives us that magnificent trilogy -- three stories -- about a woman who lost a coin, and she kept looking for it until she found it....

...Luke says God's love is like that --
God's love never gives out -- keeps
looking for whatever is lost until it's
found....

...it's Luke who tells about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep, and he wasn't content just saying, "I have ninety-nine but one happens to be lost".....and so the shepherd went out at the risk of his own life and kept looking for that one that was lost until he found it...

...and Luke says God's love is like that!
-- it never gives up.....

...it's Luke who tells about a man that had two sons. One became a prodigal and went to a far country, and the other who stayed at home and was almost equally estranged.....it's Luke who gives us in poignant terms the undiscouragable attitude of the father who never gave up...

...Luke says God's love is like that --
a love that has a concern for what appears to others as being lost....

It's Luke who makes much of the fact that Jesus Christ was a Man-of-Prayer....

It's Luke who talks about the Holy Spirit, the thing that God wants most to give us, and the very thing for which we so seldom ask....

Now on this, our name's day, we so well to say to ourselves: Are we, the members of this congregation, emulating in our emphases the things of primary concern to Luke the Evangelist?

...oh, I forgot to tell you, and it's well that I should so that it might be mentioned at this precise point of the sermon -- Luke, we're told, was a physician. Now somewhere in my notes I've recorded this as something that someone has said:

" . . A lawyer (think now specifically of a criminal lawyer) sees people at their worst; a preacher undoubtedly sees people at their best; a physician -- he sees people just as they are . . "

Luke was a physician who saw people just as they were. Now don't lose this. When you go to a physician, what does a physician really endeavor to do? -- he tries to create a situation where the healthful process of life can take over and have its own rightful emergence. That's really what a physician does -- he's geared to help you become better. The Gospel according to Luke is geared in that direction.

Now I want to conclude with an illustration. It's a rather unique one.

There was a woman who went to visit a friend, and as she drove into the driveway and parked her car there, suddenly she looked up and her eyes fell upon an evergreen tree. For some reason she had never paid it much attention before, but on that day she couldn't help but notice how perfectly beautiful the tree was, and majestic.

When she got into the house she said to her friend, "I couldn't help but notice today what a perfectly beautiful tree that is." And then her

friend had the beginnings, the trace of a smile upon her face, and she said,
"That tree has a story. Because you are my friend, I think I'll tell you.

...some years back my husband and I found that our relationships were deteriorating. We were on the verge of a divorce. I can't begin to tell you why we happened to find ourselves in that kind of a deteriorated state --- maybe because of boredom, maybe through neglect, maybe by facing an empty nest, maybe because of the turmoil of the anxiety of trying to meet the pressures --- I can't tell you -- I don't know just what it was, but I do know that we were on the verge of a divorce. And then for some strange reason we got this fanciful notion. We said, we'll plant a tree. And we said to ourselves, if the tree dies, then we'll know that our love is gone, and we'll get a divorce. But if the tree lives, we'll stay together. And you know what - ? said the lady " - - we'd surprise ourselves every now and then when we'd find each other going out there with buckets of water! "

That's what the Gospel of Luke is all about - - trying to help create the situation where God's good health can prevail.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NEARER TO THE HEART'S DESIRE"
(Deuteronomy 34:4)

If only for a little while, and even
now, O God, let the mind be still
and the heart be hushed, that we
might hear some echo of Your voice.
Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our
Lord. Amen.

Come now, let me ask you a very unusual question: do you honestly think that there could be some things about God that a person could learn too soon? Now an answer that could be given to a question such as this would be: it all depends if it's a partial truth, and if the partial truth is being told at the expense of the whole truth.

That being so, it could be said that there are some things that a man might learn too soon about God. As an example, there was the young preacher, fresh from seminary, going to his first charge, as he went around the Sunday School rooms his eye fell upon an artist's interpretation of a biblical truth -- the Abraham-Isaac story....and as anyone who has read his Bible knows, that God told Abraham to take his son up to a certain mountain, and there Abraham was given to understand that he was to sacrifice his son. According to the custom of that day, the fire had been made ready, and there, the artist's interpretation, the father stands over the son...the child in all innocence unaware that the father holds in his hand the dagger that could momentarily snuff out his life...

....that artist's interpretation of a Biblical truth happened to be hanging in a Sunday School classroom for boys and

girls who were about four, five or six years of age. The young preacher said to himself, that picture does not belong here.....needless to say, as you might surmise, the painting mysteriously disappeared.

You see, what was being taught to those young children through that painting was just a partial truth -- the whole story was not being said.

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I find myself on occasion shying away from certain Biblical passages because when I read them I just forget that the whole truth is not being told in that particular passage, and I don't like what I read. And if I had my way, I'd have the author, or the writer of even the passage in the Bible put it differently. That's my mind and my mood as I come to the sermon today, because it's based upon this troublesome passage of Scripture. When I first read it I didn't like it, and I dare say neither will you.

Well, here it is, it's the 4th verse of the 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy:

"And then the Lord said unto him,
(that's Moses)

This is the land which I promised unto
Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will
give it to your seed. I have caused you
to see it with your eyes. But, Moses,
you can't go over into it."

I don't like that passage of Scripture. I happen to know something about Moses, I happen to know what he had gone through for forty years before God put him right there at that particular spot and allowed him to see that particular promised land. And then for God to say to him, "You can look at it, Moses, but you can't go over and enjoy it."

You see, God had called Moses, very reluctantly -- that is, Moses had

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answered very reluctantly the call that came to him when he was tending his father-in-law's sheep. It was a peaceful, tranquil life. And then God upset it all --- took him away from the hinterland. Moses talked back to God and gave him all the reasons he could think of why God wouldn't want to use him, but God had other ideas,....and the gentle pressure of God upon the soul of Moses remained. So Moses gave in. And away he goes to do what God wants, because God in the meantime had promised him that He'd supply his need --- he'd even send somebody along to make his speeches for him, or help him to speak, as the case may be.

So Moses, the reluctant one, goes off to do what God wants done, and spends four decades in the process! -- forty years of leading a people who were obstreperous. They groaned and they grunted, and at the slightest provocation they cursed their leader -- gave up their idealism, and would have exchanged their wandering for what they had experienced back in Egypt.

But for forty years Moses stuck with it, because looming on the horizon for him constantly was the promised land. By the time he brought his people to the edge of the Promised Land, most of them had died, the struggle was that great. But significantly enough, Moses, their leader -- battle, scarred as he was....over 100 years of age -- stands there, a very virile chap, and in the jargon of the day, perhaps gung-ho to go in there and set his feet upon the Promised Land.

Now do you understand why I don't like this verse of Scripture by itself! God's saying to him: "There it is, Moses -- take a good look!" Then God also, to all intents and purposes, so it would appear -- putting a sign up over the Promised Land as far as Moses is concerned: NO ADMITTANCE. I just don't like that passage of Scripture.

Oh, I know that the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy says something about God doing this to Moses because God had found Moses one time with a fit of impatience, and so God was punishing Moses in this way.....well I wish the writer would never have said that! Because I don't think that's a true and accurate picture of God if you just let it stand by itself.

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The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ does not react like that -- in order to punish a man for one expression of impatience, and perchance unbelief -- just for one? There may have been other reasons, but the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy was the product of his time....

...if this be heresy, then let me be charged with heresy by telling you, the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy was seeing things through the lens of his time, and they were a people who chalked up anything untoward as being an expression of the wrath of God! You displease God and God will punish you! -- that's all there is to it!

We have the added advantage. We see God through the eyes of Jesus Christ.

But nonetheless, I can remember when I first discovered that this passage of Scripture was making an impression upon me and maybe out of my own experience I can say to you that a man, or a child, rather, might learn some things about God too soon, simply because the whole story might not be told.

But as over against that, life itself seems to prove a point like this, doesn't it? Men live out the days of their years, just about to grasp the thing toward which they have been reaching, and then -- "You can't have it!"

The Assistant Pastor of this congregation and I delight every now and then in recalling some people that we've known together through the years,

and we stop occasionally to talk about this character and that character, unusual people in their own right....

....there was Jay McCoy.

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Jay was really quite a hharacter. In essence he was God's rugged individual. Many of you might not be able to appreciate this, but those of you who can most certainly will -- he was a product of a Billy Sunday Campaign -- the revivalist of another generation. And Jay gave his whole heart and soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us used to say rather facetiously that Jay even had his own back door to the Lord -- the Lord was that real to him!

Jay was in the printing business. He was a hard worker. Three of his sons were with him in the printing business, and as you might surmise, he hoped and prayed for the day when the sons could take over. They built up quite a business for themselves, and then the day came when they had outgrown their plant and they could build a plant, a brand new unit, almost to ideal specifications.

Jay engineered it all. They moved the old equipment and put in new equipment. Everything was in place. Then Jay turned the key in the lock and went home that night, all set, geared for production the next morning. Jay died in his sleep -- within grasp, but he couldn't reach it.

This is the story that's written time and time again in many people's lives. One finishes his earthly pilgrimage with so much yet to be done. One summer not too long ago I set up in my plan for reading everything that Robert Frost had written. Of all that I read, there is one sentiment that remains in my mind. As Robert Frost in his own way could put it: "There may be some things that will always be left to Unfinished Business." And

this is true for many people, this is the way that life seems to spell it out.

So there are those of us, maybe like Omar Khayyam in the Rubaiyat would say if we had our way:

"Ah, love, could you and I with fate conspire,
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits, and then,
Remold it nearer to our heart's desire?"

We'd have every life coming into fulfillment, every noble objective being attained -- if you and I had our way, we'd bring to every life-story a happy, successful conclusion.

Yet do you know that they tell me that today, in this increasing age of longevity, 88 out of 100 people will reach 50 years of age....17 out of 100 will reach 85 years of age and more.....am I not correct in telling you that there are over 10,000 people in the United States today who are 100 years of age and older?.....

.....and yet, if the thing could be articulated by those who reach the sunset years of life, they by their own admission might say, "There are still many things that I would like to have done, so many things that I would like to have realized, but on this side of Heaven's gate I know it will not be so."

Well, one has to see the thing in the light of the whole story. It was God who stood by Moses' side and said, "You can see it, but you can't go in and put down your feet" -- but it was God who told him this. For even against that kind of shadow that was cast against life it was still God who is speaking, and this and this alone is the only thing that keeps life from being a senseless thing. Granted we may have our frustrations, but it's still God who comes to us through the frustration. Before this service is concluded you

will hear the names read at the altar of those in the congregation who have departed this life in the Christian faith since last All Saints' Day. They reveal a variety of temperament and personality and within the age spectrum itself. As I looked over the list prayerfully in anticipation of this service, I could not help but think how in this case of this person's life and that person's life, there was still the reaching out. The earthly pilgrimage was completed and the grasp unrealized. But does this make living pointless?

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" -- the character, the strength of Jay McCoy's life lie in his striving after, and the lessons that were taught in his having striven. Will you say that the life of Jesus Christ, taken away at the age of 33 years, in such a senseless way, thanks to man's inhumanity to man -- was a pointless thing?

"Let me die working,
Still tackling plans unfinished,
Tasks undone, clean to its end.
Swift may my race be run,
No lagging steps, no faltering,
No shirking,
Let me die working.

Let me die thinking.
Let me fare forth still with an
open mind,
The fresh secrets to unfold,
New truths to find,
My soul undimmed, alert,
No questions blinking.
Let me die thinking."

As you might surmise, in Switzerland there lived once upon a time, not too long ago, a chap whose great delight was scaling Alpine peaks -- at least that was the objective of his life, and he spent whatever time and energy he could attempting it. Then he set for himself his final goal: the granite side of

of your cliff, 100 feet high. He set out to achieve his life's dream.

Hand over hand on the rope he went. And then, just as his foot was about to be raised over the ledge on the final reach, as you know now --- the rope was severed on the edge of the sharp rock, and he fell --- the final blow --- to the depths below.

His friends found him. They built a monument there for him at the foot of the peak. And these were the words they inscribed on the monument:

"HE DIED CLIMBING"

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

December 6, 1970

"HE COMES: REJECT HIM"

O Lord, open thou my lips,
and my mouth shall show
forth thy praise. Amen.

As anyone knows who has been ill, the enforced idleness which is convalescence is not an unmixed blessing. For one thing, it allows for relaxed, reflective thought -- which is a rare thing these days for all of us in contemporary society who are geared to a feverish pace. So fresh behind me now are those days, in retrospect only so quickly passed, that did occasion hour upon hour, whether flat on my back or sitting in an arm-chair gazing into the distance -- when one did absolutely nothing but think....and think.....and think.

Interestingly enough, there's always plenty to think about, for the spectrum can be as wide as life itself. Now I haven't the slightest notion to introduce you to even a fraction of what went through my mind these past three weeks, except by your leave to suggest as discreetly as I can that I did do what I think every person ought to do -- think about his own role in life.....to what end ought one get well?....what purpose now is there to be served if one is to be restored to health and strength?.....
...just what is it that claims one's time and energy?will my getting well make any difference at all?

It's a salutary thing to reflect in this manner. And so quite unashamedly I don't mind telling you, during those days I did think upon the role which God has seen fit to have given me to play, to serve as a pastor

and as a preacher. Then as I anticipated my returning to the pulpit, I presume it was my surgeon who brought into clear and proper focus, more so than anybody else quite recently, when, as I saw him in mid-week and told him of my intention to preach today, I said to him, "Is it alright with you if I preach on Sunday?" And his answer came immediately, with wit every bit as sharp as his scalpell! -- "Well, it's alright with me, if you feel you have anything to say."

...and quite properly so. For a man ought never to stand at a sacred desk unless he honestly believes he has something to say.

It's not vanity in me that prompts me to tell you now, rather I would look upon it as an ounce of integrity, but I would never want to come to this sacred desk, asking you to pay attention, or for me to have given myself in the course of the week in preparation to preach, unless I honestly believed that there was something that needed saying -- and in God's good time and in this place that perhaps could be said through me, or any preacher who happens to stand at the sacred desk.

I have it on good authority that once when a group of people were gathered together, the man in charge of the program happened to notice that Albert Einstein entered the room. The man at the podium, of course, went to the distinguished man and said, "Won't you grace the head table with your presence?"....and to that end Einstein accommodated him.

....then, as you might well imagine, the presiding officer was carried away with the presence of this distinguished guest, and in due course of time he turned to Albert Einstein and said, "Wouldn't you care to come to the

rostrum and say a few words? -- wouldn't you like to speak to us?"

...Einstein stood up and went to the rostrum, and much to the chagrin of the presiding officer, and to the utter amazement of all who were present, the bushy white-haired man, with a turtlesack sweater and sandals, simply stood up and said, "I really don't have anything to say." ...and then he sat down...

...only to get up immediately and say, "But maybe if you ask me again some other time, I might have something to say."

What, I say to you now, if when Sunday came, staring a preacher straight in the eye, he would have to admit to himself and before God that he had nothing to say! But for those of us who are called into the Christian ministry to be the proclaimer of God's Good News, whether you realize it or not, the well never runs dry! There is always some good word to be spoken for Jesus Christ. To that end I dedicate myself anew as I come to this pulpit this morning.

I was also sobered by the fact that when I would return to preach, I would be returning in the Advent season. With a fair degree of zeal I thought it would be last Sunday, but it wasn't. But here I am in the Second Sunday in Advent and I must tell you -- I don't know how it may be with you but I can only speak for myself -- my soul is fairly on tiptoe as I come to the Advent season. There is something about Advent that is so uniquely different. Unashamedly I tell you that as your Pastor, I live from one Advent to another. I've tried to figure out in recent days just why it is that Advent has its own rightful claim upon one's soul. I've come up with this thought or so -- maybe it's because Advent comes at the particular time of the year that it does, in bleak winter. And

Advent always carries itself as a harbinger of brighter and better days, and that's something to excite one's soul, isn't it?

And then I also recognize that when we consider Advent, we're thinking about what happened when Jesus Christ first came, when the darkness of the world had set in. Then God set shining that Bethlehem Star which has never gone out...

...Advent reminds me that above the noises and din and clamor of life -- it was against a background such as that that angels were heard to sing...

...Advent reminds me that there was a time when old men died, weary of living, and deliberately facing the prospect of death ...and this at a time when a Child was born, a Child unlike any other child...

...Advent reminds me that there was that time when any number of disillusioned and despondent people, regarding the sad state of the world, said one to the other: "For God's sake, look what the world has come to!".....and as over against that there is the Advent echo from Heaven itself as the Advent message declares: "For your sake, look what's coming to the world!" That, I suggest to you, is an entirely different story, an entirely different tune.

Upon continued reflection, it did occur to me that Advent makes its rightful claim upon my soul because it's so unique, so specifically Christocentric, or if you please, it is one-person-in-particular-oriented. Advent, if it means anything at all, means the coming of Jesus Christ! Advent, as the word implies, means coming. But what's coming? And that's the ques-

tion that has to be asked. Advent deals with coming -- the coming of what? Amazingly enough, we end up not dealing with a what but with a who. For Advent marks the coming...

...not of a new day

...not of a new idea

...not of a new program

...not of a new structure

...not of a new principle, not of a new invention...

....Advent deals with the coming of a person. And that person is Jesus Christ -- God in human form....the coming of God's new man, for that remains the world's great need: man made new by God's indwelling.

Advent, as I understand it, is God from His vantage-point looking upon the world going to hell and saying, "But you don't have to go to hell! You were meant to be saved. Since from My vantage-point I see full well that you can't save yourselves, I will come and save you -- I Myself!" That's the meaning of Advent -- Someone's coming! -- and that coming is Jesus Christ.

So that we might not forget this, the Church fathers so wisely established the Church Year with its four Sundays before Christmas, the beginning cycle of a brand new year, properly called Advent. And its theme: one of warning -- watch out! get ready! Someone's coming! And that Someone is Jesus Christ.

It's been reported that after World War I there was quite a gathering of people in Edinburgh University's main hall. The man who had been asked to address those who had gathered in that place for that particular occasion was none other than David Balfour, philosopher and one-time Premier of Great Britain. The occasion was being held against the back-ground of all the ter-

rible destruction of World War I. Man had triggered the button that left one city, one country, a continent in ruins. The theme of the occasion was "Pathways To a New World" and to this David Balfour addressed himself.

...he spoke, I am told, about the necessity of people increasing their knowledge of world affairs...

...he spoke about the absolute necessity of training men in the art of state-craft...

...he spoke about something vaguely referred to as morality..

Then as it looked that he was finished speaking, mark you, a Chinese student arose from the rear, and in a voice that could be heard by all who were present, the young Oriental asked the speaker:

"But, Sir, what about Jesus Christ?"

Some in that audience, I am told, were disturbed that the meeting should be so interrupted. Some there were who pitied the poor student. Others were so completely irritated because they felt it a very nonsensical question.

Then there was World War II, and the destruction was even worse than World War I. And after World War II we have on our hands the first civilization known to man that is absolutely scared to death of itself! And one reason may be that no matter how well-intentioned we may be, whenever we come together to talk about Pathways To A Brave New World, we enshrine Man upon the altar, and we allow ourselves to believe that it is within the capability of man himself to chart the course. But God from His vantage-point is always whispering, if not shouting to us, that man can't do it by himself. You just can't rule God out of the picture. The world wasn't meant to run on man's terms and man's terms alone! And if Advent means anything at all, it's God's call to us: "I've got to be in the picture --

-- don't rule Me out! -- I'll not opt for anything like that." Advent reminds us that Jesus Christ belongs. And there's no hope for man, aside from the new man in Jesus Christ.

This sermon is the first in the series, one of three to be preached during this Advent season by your Senior Pastor. The entire series bears the title: "HE COMES". Each sermon has a sub-title. Today's sub-title is "Reject Him".....is that possible? If man so needs what only God can give, will man reject? The history of man for it: he will. Which is simply to say that there is no automatic acceptance of goodness. Much as we may need God, we never accept Him automatically.

And well that it should be so, for automatic acceptance of God is absolutely meaningless to God, and serves no purpose in our life whatsoever. Acceptance of God has meaning only because there is always the possibility of rejection. And I, with all the ardor of my soul, as God gives me time and strength, would talk to you about Jesus Christ. On this Sunday in Advent I raise for you a warning flag: there is always the possibility of rejecting Him.

The character-of-characters in the Christmas story that personifies this is none other than Herod himself. We call him Herod the wicked king, but in a little-known-fact, let me remind you a thing or two about Herod.

...others referred to him historically as Herod-the-Great. He ruled for at least four decades. He did something for Judea that no other king had ever done -- he established order and law. In a magnanimous moment he built for them the temple that bears his name. One year when there was a great famine and the people who were his subjects had little to eat, he it was who even sold his own gold plate, that wheat might be purchased from afar that his people might be fed. Herod-the-Great.

This is a warning, my friend. Man is an unredeemed creature, and every one of us has that very subtle streak. Herod has his. He couldn't stand the threat that anyone might bring to him and his power. Be careful, my friend, you and I sometimes think that we can allow ourselves the curse of a suspicious streak, that it just won't do much harm to think ill of other people constantly, to be afraid of their threat to us.

Herod ended up a murderous old man, that's what he did...suspicious of his wife, he had her murdered.....suspicious of his mother-in-law, Alexandra, he had her murdered.....suspicious of his own three sons, he issued the order by which they were assassinated. When he recognized the threat that was coming now in the word that there was somebody born to be King of the Jews, he issued that most diabolical of all orders, which brought about the murder of the Innocents.

Is it possible that when the goodness of God is fully exposed, the worst in us might come out? Only if that's the way we want it to be. Advent gives us time to think it over. He is coming. There's the possibility of rejection. But don't let it happen to you.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Advent

December 12, 1970

"HE COMES: IGNORE HIM"

You know very well, O God, that this is not the only place where Your voice can be heard. Your voice can be heard in many places, in many different ways and at many different times. But we'd like to believe that in this place it's made a bit easier to hear Your voice. Maybe it will happen right now, Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

In company with some of you, as most of you may know, I have the good fortune to come from immigrant stock. My father and my mother never quite gave up their native tongue. We youngsters there in the household would hear them talking quite frequently in their own language. They never quite succeeded in teaching us the language which they had been taught in the days of their childhood, and of course we are the poorer because of it. But even though we did not fully understand what they were saying when they spoke in their native tongue, and while it wasn't necessary for us to even read the expression on their faces, we could very easily detect by the tone of the voice whether they were moved by anger, impatience, frustration, or by pity and by compassion.

In the town in which I grew up there were four furniture factories. One of them was right behind the place where we lived. There was an alley between us and Heilsen's Furniture Factory. Now the four factories were located where they were in that town because there was a railroad that ran right through the village. That meant that the furniture factory was between us and the railroad tracks.

In those days it wasn't at all unusual for tramps and beggars to come to town, riding the freight cars. And because quite frequently there would be the switching of the cars for the lumber yards located by the main track, it was an easy place, then, for the tramp or the beggar to get off the freight and to walk the streets and the alleys of the town and to see how he might fare.

Because we happened to be located so close to the tracks, we were seldom missed. And as God gives me memory, I don't think my mother ever refused a beggar that came to our door. With my father it was a bit different -- he had traveled a great deal. There were some men that he could never quite trust, and because he was as industrious as he was, he lacked patience with people who never really did a day's work, for whatever may have been the reason.....and I can still hear Mother remonstrating with Dad in her own way, saying under her breath, in the Arabic equivalent which I now give you -- "But a person ought to show pity!.....

...But a person ought to show pity! ..."

Now bear with me, will you. Turn the pages of history, go back through the corridors of time, find yourself in another village, Bethlehem by name. Strangers had come to town that night. They were weary travelers, a man and a woman. They had been on the road for at least three days, because they had come from a town 70 or 80 miles away. They needed to find lodging.

They are first greeted by the inn-keeper, and the inn-keeper shakes his head and he says, 'No' -- as only a man could afford to say 'No' whose place was completely filled up and already had on his hands the problems that could be so exacting for the man who was responsible for the place.

It made little difference to him that they happened to be in the condition that they were. The answer came: "No."

Now I suggest that you think in terms of a character that you may not have recognized before. She's never mentioned anywhere in the Scriptures, and for that fact, the inn-keeper himself is not mentioned. There's only the statement: "There was no room for them in the inn." But if you're going to allow for the inn-keeper, why not allow for the inn-keeper's wife? Can't you see her coming to him, as her eye has caught the woman heavy with child, understanding as only another woman, as only another mother could...

..."But Yusuf, we can make room . . ."

(... 's person ought to have pity'...)

But the inn-keeper wasn't about to make room.

But clever woman that the inn-keeper's wife was, equally compassionate, she scans the register...

"How about this one, Yusuf -- he didn't pay his bill last year. We can afford to ask him to leave, and to let them take his place!"

...but the inn-keeper said "No."

"How about this one -- he's never stopped here before, and what is more, I don't like his looks, and I've my own thoughts about the woman that he's brought along with him. Surely we can ask them to leave!"

...but the inn-keeper shakes his head, "No."

...and all the while the inn-keeper's wife is saying, "But a person ought

to show pity!"

And then as though God heard her prayer, the inn-keeper says, "Very well, let them go to the stable, let them make do as best they can."

Fortunately, God's been conditioned by man's treatment by this time. And God's quite able to fend for himself. And that night God made do as best He could.....

...oh by the way, there's a text for this sermon,

it's the 7th verse of the 2nd chapter of the

Gospel according to Luke:

"And she brought forth her first-born son and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn."

You might be interested in knowing that I checked out seven different translations. A preacher does that sometimes in preparing a sermon, hoping to find some new insight from a translator that might give him a better understanding of the text itself....

(quite parenthetically, let me tell you why I do

this: it pays off, ever so often, as it did with that text the Apostle Paul, the Jew-become-Christian, the tent-maker-turned-preacher, the man whose name was changed from Saul to Paul -- you remember he wrote letters to Christians in different places. And once he was trying to spell out to them just what it means to be a Christian. And in that Second Letter that he wrote to a group of Christians who lived in Corinth he said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."...and that's the way one translator after another kept it for years, until my favorite Bible

translator came along, J. B. Phillips, and with his scholarship, and with the stamp of his own personality, in a very exacting way makes that text read, not, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation," but:

"If any man be in Christ, he becomes a brand new person altogether."

...now how about that putting it into sharp focus! How about that giving it a pristine touch!)

...well, I had hoped, quite honestly, that maybe if I searched out these seven different translations, I might come upon a text that would say it differently. But every last one of them comes out in the same way:

"No room"....."No place".....

...that happens to be a fact, and you can't say it any other way.

The Christmas truth is an eternal truth, a two-sided eternal truth. One is that God comes to us, God takes the initiative, God will not wash His hands of this world forever, God Himself will make the divine invasion on earth.

The other side of the Christmas truth which is the eternal truth is that man, because of his fallen-ness, man as an unredeemed creature will tend to ignore and reject and fail to recognize the God-who-comes. That's the strange thing about the Christmas truth -- God comes....man seems to be unable to recognize Him, man tends to ignore Him.

I ask myself again and again the question: why should this be? I've come up with some answers.

...one answer may be that while we may be mindful of the fact of God, we want God to appear on our terms, and we want God to appear on the horizon according to our schedule. But God doesn't operate on man's

terme! And God comes ever so often quite unexpectedly, in unexpected ways. This is one reason why when He came as He did, in the form of a child, there were few if any who recognized Him.

Why will we ignore Him?....Take that Bethlehem inn-keeper as an example -- he's a prototype of all too many of us. Honestly, now -- he wasn't a bad chap, and you can't say that he was hard-hearted. After all, he did say, well try the stable, don't expect anything from me, I won't help you. But at least I'll let you get along as best you can.....why does man talk that way to God? Well maybe the inn-keeper can help us to understand man's nature in this regard. The inn-keeper was a very busy person. He never had a night quite like that night. In fact, I'm willing to wager that it's probably the best night that he ever had in his business, and ever would have. And that meant that he had all kinds of problems....

...he had to put up with the wrangling of the quarreling of certain of his guests...

...he had to worry about those fellows who got into a drunken brawl, as soon as they met, and kept bleeding themselves up into the wee small hours of the morning....

...he had to worry about certain disreputable characters that might bring a bad reputation to his place...but after all, he did allow them to register...

...and to top all of that, there were some that he wasn't quite able to get payment for in advance, and there was

always the possibility that he might be beaten....

...these were the things that were on his mind. His mind was already occupied.

The inn-keeper is the proto-type of many of us -- any number of other things already claim their priority. And then when God does come along, our attention is already claimed by something else. Could that be the reason why?

Or could it be that men have a way of dealing with priorities but they've never learned how to select their priorities? The living of our years is basically a matter of choosing priorities! -- and the sad story of man's relationship with God is that God all too frequently comes out third...fourth...fifth...sixth place. When does He come out with the classification of Top Priority?

"When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet,
and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were
His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human
flesh was cheap."

...then Studdert Kennedy, who wrote these lines, says,

"When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give
Him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left Him
in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know not
what they do,'
And still it rained the wintry rain that drenched Him
through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary."

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE COMES: RECOGNIZE HIM"

Still as of old, O God, we honestly believe that You do make Yourself known to us. Sometimes it is beyond this place. Quite frequently it's in this place, for there are those of us who keep returning because we honestly believe that it's made a bit easier to recognize the truth of the Eternal accent when we gather together even as we are found in this place now. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Most of us have friends who travel. Practically all of them, when they go on their journey, may have their camera slung over their shoulder. And all of this is simply to suggest that sooner or later, so it seems, we're invited over to their place to see the pictures that they took.

Granted our friends have an eye for the esthetic, it may be that we look at slide after slide that's thrown on the screen, that perchance there will be a picture of a sun reflecting and scattering its rays upon the horizon. Impressed by its beauty, somebody in the group might say, "What a beautiful sunset.....or is it a sunrise?" To the unskilled eye it might not be possible to detect whether it is a sunrise or a sunset. But there's a difference -- a great difference between the sunrise and the sunset.

For a moment or two let me wax philosophical, will you?

-- the setting of the sun means completion and fulfillment --

reflection. If you please -- well, this is another day that's over. It's run its course. The light continues to

recede and darkness sets in....a degree of completion.

-- to the contrary, as far as the sunrise is concerned, the mood is one of expectancy, and anticipation. The Psalmist centuries ago was able to say, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." With the sunrise there is not diminishing light but increasing light, and our eyes are opened to beauty that otherwise we were not made aware of in the darkness.

...to the contrary, of course, with the sunset. Thanks to the hymn-writer, or to the poet, the mood of it all is expressed for us as well as Tennyson said:

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.
Twilight and evening bell
And after that the dark . . ."

...yes, of course there's a great deal of resignation about the sunset. One could almost add, a measure of relief -- it's over now -- it's gone. It's done.

But not so the sunrise. Let me say it again, it's characterized by expectancy and anticipation. Let it be put this way: we may say farewell to the sunset, but it's the dawn that we welcome. Here again, turn to the hymn-writer or the poet who sets the mood for us in this case:

"Come, my soul, Thou must be waking;
Now is breaking o'er the earth another day."

Perchance as you and I may go on a trip we carry around in the recesses of our mind certain things that we hope might happen before we get home. We might not be inclined to talk to other people about them, lest we be disappointed and they too, in knowing how earnestly we set our hearts upon certain things. Back almost a quarter of a century now, on that first trip to Europe, how eagerly I expected crossing the Atlantic, and then in the inner recesses of my own mind I tucked away certain things that I prayed to God I might experience before I'd get home. I remember so well that day in Switzerland when we went to that tiny town called (Toom), crossing the lake, and then a small company of us went by (fini-cula) to Mt. Niessen. And atop Mt. Niessen is a hostel that can accommodate only about 20 people. It exists for one purpose only: to provide overnight accommodation for those who come earnestly seeking the experience of the sunset and the sunrise in the Alps. I had to pinch myself to make myself believe that it was taking place.

Greatly impressed by the splendor and the beauty of the sunset, I went to bed but I could hardly sleep, because I was anticipating the sunrise. There's hardly any comparison between the two -- there's nothing but contrast. The one is resignation and completion and fulfillment.... ...the other is expectation and anticipation -- increasing light, unfolding opportunities to live the hours that are being given.

I submit to you this morning, that there are people like that, whose lives are characterized by either sunsets or sunrises. There are some folks that all of us know who live as though they're only facing the sunset, that they just can't wait until it's all over -- they just can't wait until it will come to an end. They are not souls that go movingly through

life on tiptoe. They anticipate only completion, and they live lives that are almost totally resigned.

To the contrary, all of us are enriched by people whose lives are lived according to the prospect of the sunrise. They order the course of their years expectantly. They live anticipating the dawn of a new day, the promise and the prospect of unfolding opportunities, the joy of greeting increasing light on which more than one new beauty will be revealed.

I want to talk to you very briefly this morning about two people, from the Gospel according to Luke, who lived their lives in anticipation of a new day. Traditionally we're led to believe that they were old people, and that's significant. It was the aged Simeon...she was the older, Anna. They were devout people. They made frequent trips to the temple. Simeon, in particular, ordered his days with the prospect that one day -- it might be the very next day, God would appear to him as he had not appeared before, and would bring a measure of revelation that his soul had never experienced in all the years that he had lived.

Simeon is the old man, you know, he's represented here in the second stained glass window in the Nave of Saint Luke Church. It's called, "The Presentation." On the eighth day in the life of our Blessed Lord, when he was brought, according to custom, to the temple, and there in the temple waiting -- the old man and the old woman. And the old man said something about, "It's alright now, Lord -- let me go in peace, for I have been able to see what you've promised. This is the thing for which I have been living."

I suppose I could make much of the fact again that he was an old man, but yet ordering the days of his years on tiptoe. I could make much of the

fact that he was an old man -- who because of his maturity was able to discern what others were not able to see -- the full and perfect revelation of God-in-Jesus Christ.

You have heard me say it before, there's tragedy in the Christmas story -- not simply the slaughter of the Innocents, (which happens to be the theme of one of the presentations of the chancel drama to be given by our young people the Sunday night after Christmas)....but there's also tragedy in the truth that when Jesus Christ did loom on the horizon of life, most people never recognized him. Says John-the-Gospel-writer as he indicts so many of us, "There stands one among you whom you do not know".....and that person happened to be Jesus Christ, the longed-for Messiah. When He came, there were people who never recognized Him. The story of saintly Simeon is the story of a man who lived in the blessed hope that one day God would appear as He had never appeared before.

Interestingly enough, of the few in his day who recognized Him for what He was, Simeon was the first. And I can't make too much of the fact that this happened because he lived expectantly. He never ruled out the possibility that one day God would come in a very special way!

Are you anticipating anything wonderful in the future? Or are you foolish enough to believe that all the good that has ever happened has already taken place? They are the sad ones. They are the people that I know who are most forlorn, who believe that God and His goodness has closed the chapter, who imprison God in the past and no longer enjoy the thrill of anticipation, of expectation.

I am constrained to tell you that God does appear -- here and there --

deliberately. And when He does, as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, there are only three possible reactions, and every single one of them is personified in one character or another in the Christmas story...

...there is the reaction of hostility...

...once God looms on the horizon in the fact of Jesus Christ there are those who say we must reject Him -- there can be no such thing as co-existence with a God like that! He's too troublesome, He's too demanding. We will have to get rid of Him....

...there's a second kind of reaction to God when He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ -- personified by the inn-keeper as we talked about it in last Sunday's sermon -- treat Him with indifference.... "I'll go my way, God -- you make do as best you can on your own."

...eventually there are those who are Christ as He is, and respond to Him as they ought. While the story of God's Son will invariably include such a person as the wicked king, and such a person as the unconcerned inn-keeper, take heart! -- there will always be a saintly Simeon. He, too, belongs in the story. Granted he may be the last of the three to make appearance, but the chapter never ends without him.

My friend, are you expecting God?

I think I can give it to you on solid authority -- God has never disappointed anyone who is really expecting Him.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

O God, It's that light from the Star that we need most in the darkness of our lives. It's that sound of the angelic chorus that we have to hear again and again, above the noises, din, clamor and confusion of this world. Perhaps even now and in this place we may be able to capture anew something of that Holy Night centuries ago. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Luke 2:14

I know a man who for some 37 years now, every time Christmas comes around, deliberately endeavors to surprise a certain lovely lady. Sometimes he succeeds, sometimes he doesn't succeed. As of the moment, he thinks he's faring quite well tonight. For the other day he secretly put under the Christmas tree this year's surprise package. Right now she doesn't know how it got to where it is, she doesn't know from whom it has come, and above all else, she isn't quite certain as to what it is. The bottom part of it is all boxed in with a nice ribbon around it...then protruding from the box part is a handle-of-sorts that's been laced with ivy. He's known quite a measure of satisfaction in trying to surprise her from year to year. He hopes he might succeed tonight.

All of this is simply to suggest that you can't possibly think of Christmas without thinking of surprises. For Christmas, properly understood, is God's surprise dealing with the human race. That first Christmas, if you please, is one surprise after another. Do you mind if for a little while I catalog some of them for you?

Begin with the peasant girl, Mary -- what a surprise it was to her to learn that God had chosen her, of all people on the face of the earth, to be His special handmaiden....

"My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . "

...and to the very day that she died, certainly, she continued to walk at tiptoe, marveling at the thought that she was surprised by God's selection....

It was a surprise for Joseph -- not yet married to Mary, to learn that she had been chosen by the Holy Spirit and that the birth of Jesus Christ was already being made effective within the stirrings of her own womb....what a surprise that was to Joseph....

A surprise indeed to certain shepherds who were watching over their flock by night -- then suddenly -- something happened that had never happened before....they heard angels singing, and the voice of the angels eventually was directed to them, and they were given a strange assignment, a special mission to be undertaken, to go from where they were to a tiny village, to follow the instructions -- suddenly they became men under orders....what a surprise night that was for them!

Imagine Herod, the wicked king, the surprise that he got when he knew that he was being threatened -- and how much more the surprise when he discovered that he couldn't possibly outwit what was taking place that night.....

And if the inn-keeper ever found out that it was in his back yard, it was in his barn-yard, that the Saviour of the world was born --

-- who knows but what he might never have been able to get over
the surprise.....

...surprise...surprise...surprise...surprise....

...this is the meaning of Christmas.

Now the text, if you will.

Having said all that's been said so far, the text reads rather prosaically -- in a very matter-of-fact tone, the 16th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the wonderful Christmas chapter....

"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn . . ."

...so what else is new? Luke-the-Gospel-writer puts it down in such a matter-of-fact way as that! As though God Himself was not surprised. God might have reasoned to Himself: I've given you intimations now for centuries, I told you that one day I would come -- prophets, priests and kings, one messenger after another, were in duty bound to make known to you that I would not wash My hands of the human race forever -- that one great day I would make My special appearing!

...when I did come, you weren't ready!

No....the Gospel writer is absolutely correct when he records it in a rather matter-of-fact way because God, having dealt with the human race for so many generations, had conditioned Himself to their pattern of behavior.

Could it be said that God had reached the point where He was no longer surprised at anything that we might do? So then, as far as that Christmas is concerned, from God's point of view, He wasn't at all surprised that there would be no room for Him in the inn.

But look at it this way: Christmas is one surprise after another because God is the Great Surpriser. He surprised Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men. He surprised those who came seeking for Him, to find Him in an animals' barnyard, with just enough space between animals in a feeding trough....what a surprise it was when God came that way.

Let me interject now very briefly, as I ask your indulgence, as I read for you a Tall Tale of Christmas....because had we been God's script-writer, this is the way we might have recorded it, the way Christmas should have been, for He who was born was born King above all kings --- let's give him a royal setting from the very beginning. Listen carefully, and watch for yourself and discover the marked contrast --- a Tall Tale of Christmas:

"Now when Jesus was born, in the city of Rome, in the days of Caesar Augustus, behold all the citizens and subjects of the Empire came from the east and the north, from the south and from the west, they came to the royal palace of the Caesars, where the Imperial Mother was seated upon her throne and adorned with the most precious jewels, where the child was lying in a golden crib. For a son had been born to the Emperor and messengers had run swiftly to every city and to every district shouting, 'Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people who are obedient and loyal to Rome, for unto you is born this day, in the city of the Caesars, a glorious hero, and a mighty warrior who is Christ the Divine Caesar. You will find this babe in the royal palace, wrapped in brilliant velvet and shining silk and lying in a golden crib.'...and wherever the messenger

had gone there were multitudes and hosts of citizens and subjects praising the gods and saying, 'Glory to the gods in the highest and on earth may the valiant warriors of Rome conquer all men.' And it came to pass that as the messenger spread the good tidings, that the men and the women of the richest families of the Empire said to one another, 'Let us now go even unto Rome and see this thing which has come to pass...let us wear our most lustrous garments, let us carry with us most expensive gifts.' And it also came to pass that the mighty armies of the Empire won new victories on distant battlefields and returned to Rome in splendid and triumphal march, thousands of slaves were brought back by boat from colonies across the great sea and were herded into the city, to bow down and worship the child and to build magnificent monuments in his honor. For many days there were feasts and sports and celebrations, for unto the Imperial Family of Rome a child was born, a son was given, to rule the world.....

....we as God's script-writers -- that's the way we would have put it -- it's under those conditions that we would have had Him come into this world. But God who is the Great Surpriser comes as a tiny babe, in an insignificant village....His first cradle a feeding trough.

One of the sad things about our day and about our generation is that life has taken such a toll of us that there are so few of us who know the thrill of being surprised. And yet in God's relationship with us, like as not He always wants to come as the Great Surpriser. God is saying to

us, "Let me show you! Let me surprise you! Let me show you what I can do with whatever it is that you offer Me, even if it only be a little! -- very well then -- "

...the innkeeper might say to Mary and Joseph, "You'll have to fend the best you can, you'll have to get along as best you can out there in the barn"

...and then God surprised all of us, and God said, "Very well! If it's straw that I must have as the manger bed for a child of Mine, then it is straw I will use!"

...God's always surprising us by the way He makes the most of the little that we give Him. God says to us: You are so busy, you have so many things to do -- I know that! I understand you far better than you think that I understand you. But God says, "Just give me fifteen minutes out of each day -- just fifteen minutes -- give me undivided attention for fifteen minutes, and I will surprise you with the way I can cast a halo upon the entire remaining period of the day!"

God said a long time ago, "You have a week of seven days. I ask for just one day, that you might call mine in a way that you don't call the other six days. I'll settle for that -- just let me have it! Let me show you what I can do, with you and through you, in one day of the week, that will bring a transforming quality to all the six remaining days of that week."

God says to the teenager: "There is so much to claim your time -- so many different directions for you to travel. Just let me have a certain chapter in your life -- respond to those who represent Me -- let them mold

and fashion your life -- your parents, your pastors, your Sunday School teachers.....and then in a very impressionable period of your life, bow your head before an altar -- take one sublime moment to make a promise to Me -- let Me have that promise, and I'll show you what I'll be able to do with that. For the rest of your life I'll surprise you with the untold good that can happen."

Christmas is one surprise after another....God daring us to allow Him to surprise us! -- by His gracious visits, by His gracious influence. Here and there there are those who have been surprised by God, and their entire life has become a Christmas forever.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A DIFFERENT WAY"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

Matt 2:12

Refer

John Milton, beloved English poet, has written in his "Hymn On The Morning of Christ's Nativity" his concept of that holy night:

"No war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around;
The idle ~~speal~~ and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood,
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by.
But peaceful was the night,
Wherein the Prince of Light - His reign of
peace upon earth begun."

That's poetry, and beautiful poetry at that. But is it true? That's the question that has to be asked. And maybe we can well afford to ask it now on this, a day or two after Christmas....the kind of thing that perhaps we might not have had the nerve to ask on the night that marked the Holy Nativity.

In fact, there was no special quietness that night. The world went on its noisy way as usual, quite unconscious and careless of the event that was happening in Bethlehem....

...men loved...men hated...and men fought.

...men bought, and men sold....they slept, or they
watched, just as on any other night....

Was Herod really sitting still that night, overcome with awe? Not a bit of it! He was following his usual habits and passtimes, knowing nothing of what was really taking place. And when he did hear the news that a prince had been born, his actions were hardly reverential. While he waited to learn where the young king lay, his soldiers stood at attention, ready to raise their hands to the arms, ready to pounce upon and to kill as soon as the place was made known. Far from it being a peaceful night, there was probably a great deal of clamor going on, and no farther away than the inn and the courtyard itself.

On this, a day or two after Christmas, we can well afford to be as realistic as all that. We say 'Silent Night, Holy Night' -- but in truth it was a mean and an ugly night, and God Himself had to reckon with that fact from the very beginning.

Now for the text, if you please, the text for this sermon on the Sunday after Christmas. It's recorded as the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And they returned to their own country
a different way."

What does that mean? That means at the outset God had to make a change in plans, a change in travel plans, if you please.

Now anyone who has done any amount of traveling, and particularly if he's going to make his first great journey, is eager to get a measure of satisfaction from his travel agent that in all likelihood everything will come off as planned. The travel agent with meticulous concern will check out schedule after schedule. And then when it's all drawn up, he might say

to his customer, to his client -- "Well here it is - bon voyage! -- I hope by the time you get back there will be no snafu, everything will be as you had hoped and planned."

And it's a deeply gratifying experience for any traveler to come back home and to know that he had everything work out -- no change in plans, no delay. It can be costly, it can be time-consuming, to say nothing of the frustration and disappointment that sets in. God, if you please, had His first great disappointment on the night in which Jesus Christ was born, and shortly thereafter. He had to make a change in plans. What does that say to us?

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that it immediately implies that God has to reckon with the fact of evil in this world, that God never discredits it, God never discounts it, God never pretends that it's not there. No one is more aware of the evil in this world than God Himself. The first Christmas story is scarcely begun until God has to deal with the fact of evil. There is a wicked king, who is diabolically possessed, so evil-minded that he will slaughter the innocents, not just one child, but any child under two years of age.

It's not easy for us to accept the fact, but there may come a time when God says to us, "Evil may not be conquered by you, and the only thing that you might be able to do at this stage is to circumvent it." Now that's not a happy thought. We'd much rather get in and probe immediately and get rid of the cancer, and eliminate it at once. But that's not always possible. So when you read this text, "They returned to their own country a different way" you have God altering plans, changing schedules, because at this certain time evil has to be circumvented.

Now let me shift gears very quickly for you, having said all that, to recognize that in this text you have the necessity for people to go back home, to go back to the world of which they must still be part. Martin Luther, bless his soul, in one of his Christmas sermons, makes reference to the fact that the shepherds, then, returned to their fields...the wise men went back to their country...and Mary and Joseph with the third member of their family went back to Nazareth...

...and I dare say, with something of a twinkle in his eye, and with tongue-in-cheek, Martin Luther, great preacher that he was, said, "Why, surely that's a mistake! -- the Gospel writer doesn't have it down correctly! -- surely having seen the Christ-child, having been exposed to such a wonderful experience -- now they shall be stationed in a royal palace, or they shall be stationed in the temple itself! -- they shall be surrounded constantly with beauty and glory! Surely it's a mistake that they have to go back, to the prosaic, mundane aspect of life."

But if the Scriptures do anything for us, the Scriptures always deal with life realistically, and the truth of the matter is, they had to go back.

It would have been so much easier to stay where there is peace and quiet and beauty....it would have been so much easier to stay on bended, adoring knee and give worship and homage to the Christ-child. I will not divulge names, I will not even go so far as to give you a characterization that you might recognize, but I will simply tell you, as with what authority I can tell you, that there are some people who live from week to week, members of this congregation, for the peace and the quiet and the strength that they know in God's House, in this place...and it is with a measure of reluctance

that once the Benediction is pronounced they have to turn their backs and return, to the torment of hell that some of them have to face day by day. This is a truth hardly discernible to some of you, because this may not be your situation. And yet this could well be true of the person who sits in front of you or behind you, a stranger whom you do not know. But life can be like that for some people.

And then there comes the benediction when the worship is over. And what is the benediction except God's-marching-orders-to-us saying, "Okay, now -- get with it! Get away from this place, and go back and face the world -- your own country, which you cannot escape."

I have little patience with people who keep telling us that religion does a disservice to people by allowing them to believe that they can escape life. Christianity, properly understood, is always driving us back to the world! -- and even as we mark the invasion of God in this world by Jesus Christ, His first directive to those who were part of the Christmas story: "Now you go back, to your day's work, to the home where you have to live and to labor and to love." So they went back to their own country.

But let's look at that text again:

"And they returned to their own country
a different way . . ."

Allow me, if you please, for the moment at least, to do something with that text, and to tell you that you ought to make something more of it than simply a matter of geography and routing and scheduling. Why don't you quite honestly say to yourself, that can also be translated:

"They went back to their own country
differently . . ."

....implying that they themselves went back as different people.

How could it be otherwise?....

...they had been exposed to the naked fact of God

...they had been exposed to God's complete revelation
in Jesus Christ

...and that is meant to make a difference.

There are any number of people who don't agree with me. But I am convinced that there is a dividing line between people, and on one side there are those who have had a direct encounter with God through Jesus Christ -- unmistakably clear

...and on the other side, those who haven't.

I think a line can be drawn, and I honestly believe that it's there.

I once heard a highly respected Jesuit Roman Catholic priest say to me, that the sad thing any number of people deny the fact that such a line could exist. If Christmas means anything at all, it means that God has come, God is here.in fact the word for it is EMMANUEL, which means God-with-us.

There should be no question about it. Mary and Joseph went back to Nazareth, but they were not the same people who went up to Bethlehem.....

...the shepherds went back to tend their flocks.....but who can say

they were the same people who got the angels' message

and who went to Bethlehem to see what had taken place?

...the wise men had traveled a great distance, and they came with

adoring knee, and they offered their homage and they

were given a directive to go back to their country....and

who can say that they went back the same people?

Christmas has come. Christmas is about over.
Has it made a difference?

I want to close with a very simple illustration that may indict any number of us. May it subtly prick your mind and disturb you....

...a Jewish girl was injured in an automobile accident. The ambulance came and rushed her to the hospital. The injury was quite serious. There was one special nurse who cared for her, with complete devotion, and skillfully so. Somewhere in the course of the relationship the Jewish girl said, "Are you a Christian? -- you seem to be so tender, so compassionate -- are you a Christian?"

...and the nurse said, "Yes."

...and then the Jewish girl said, "I'm surprised, because, I guess the only other Christians that I've ever known have been Christmas shoppers."

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Years ago the U.S. Public Health Service issued a statement in connection with the prevalence of nerve disease, and the tendency of worry to weaken and to shorten life. In this statement was the following observation, no doubt supported by the words of Jesus -

"So far as is known, no bird ever tried to build more nests than its neighbor. No fox ever fretted because he had only one hole in which to hide. No squirrel ever died of anxiety lest he should not lay by enough for two winters instead of one, and no dog ever lost any sleep over the fact that he had not enough bones laid aside for declining years."

"Too often, no matter what people profess as to their faith, worry and anxiety make them practical atheists, for worry fears the future more than it fears God."

①

Deadly Sin: Anxiety

Text: Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious
about your life - - - Matthew 6:25

In the life of Jesus, I'm not quite certain why
Jesus began during the Middle Ages when he decided
to catalogue the so-called deadly sins -- weren't there
even according to his listing -- why he never included
Worry or ANXIETY.

The ~~modern~~ Holy Father may have not called
anxiety a deadly sin. I have chosen to do so, and I'll

② Tell you why right from the start -- (A) most
people I know worry -- and it has always constituted
one of my besetting sins (B) Jesus warned against
it in no uncertain manner. Hear the words that as
Matthew, the Gospel writer, remembered them:

= Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious - - -
(Matthew 6:25)

People worry. Worry about almost anything and everything.
If they don't have anything to worry about at the moment, they
worry that they don't have anything to worry about!

Some people even worry about other folks who don't
worry. The worriers think the non-worriers should worry.

Honestly, now, maybe we'll never be brought with the

(3) business of worrying. It's a misery that afflicts ^{virtually} every age.

There was a day when youth seemed to escape it,

But not anymore. Some psychologists say that the hard-
to-understand behaviour of the young may stem from the
realization that they are the first generation to grow up in a
world with the possibility of nuclear annihilation before them.
They worry about a tomorrow that could be denied them!

On older friends worry. While youth may worry
that they might not get to live very long, the aging fret -
worry out and worry, worry about living too long.

Our senior citizens are concerned about who will
take care of them in their last years. To top it off we need

(4) to say that half of the population, less than
30 years old, is a generation frequently characterized
as having little

^(a)
= This is the Christian insight that there
is a devil somewhere in the picture. He is often
called Satan. It really doesn't make very much
difference what we call him, or how you picture him,
with or without horns, hoofs and fork. The point
is that there seems to be in the world an evil
strength that is over and above anything that
man is responsible for. There seems to be powers
of evil that get men in their grip and will
not let them go. Jesus talked and acted as
though he believed this. He spent a large part
of his short ministry fighting the demons, ~~against~~
which he believed possessed people and
distorted their whole life, physically and
spiritually. He himself wrestled with Satan
in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry,
and he spoke about the Kingdom over which
Satan ruled --

(-- we look at the world about us --
near at hand and far away -- the fact of
evil is regularly present. How account for the
fact of evil?) = We remembered, almost with

(1)

with relief, how Christianity has said
from the beginning that not only men
fell, but that one of the chief angels
fell (Revelation 12: 7-9). He, too,
rebelled in his jealousy and ambition
to be "tops" and used his freedom
to go his own way, so that the
crooked streak we found in men runs
in some strange way all through the
universe.

= This may seem to some of you a
dreary point of view to express at a time
when the world is already dreary enough,
and yet I think that more and more
of you are realizing that we shall never
get anywhere by blindly adhering to the
facts of existence, and especially to the
unpleasant ones. For a long time, toward the
turn of the century, we tried to make
ourselves ~~believe~~ think that all was right
with ourselves and the world.

(C)

We know now that it isn't, even
we are not in a position to do
anything about it until we admit
it.

= Christianity is essentially an
optimistic religion, but it is
pessimistic to this extent; it sees
that men can be devils if they choose
to be. Unless you see that, you
will not see, because you will not
need, the tremendous release that
Christianity can give you from just
this devilish tendency. You do not
want to be morbidly obsessed with it;
neither do you want to be foolishly
ignorant of it."

- Theodore Parker Foss